



Bagpipe

Westport, CT...
'94 Nationals...



The professionalism of the Bacardi Guys, the symbolism of the Bagpipe musician at the opening ceremony, the thrill of the race, the Thistle kids, and the ongoing entertainment made this year's Nationals a memorable one.





the **THISTLE**

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE THISTLE CLASS

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THE GOVERNING BOARD

L. to R., Standing: Joseph Cameron (273), Gordon K. Douglass (1), Wally Lineburgh (391), Tony Herrmann (32), Frank Marquardt (336), Jack Fordyce (494).

Seated: Howard Boston (111), Carl Barnett (263), Edward J. Hanna (350), Ron Small (221), Les Heyer (505).

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Why Does The Thistle Look Like That?

by Gordon (Sandy) K. Douglass

79,642 people examined the THISTLE. 79,641 asked the question, "Why does she look like that?" The other was a Hungarian D.P. who couldn't speak English.

That, in essence, was the reception the THISTLE received when she first was shown at the 1947 Motor Boat show. Most of the 79,641 were polite. A few outraged individuals appeared to consider the THISTLE a personal affront, saying she didn't look like a boat. I hope they have become reconciled to the fact that she sails like a boat even if she doesn't look like one.

All right then, why does the THISTLE look like that? And why does she outperform other boats, the owners of which may think she shouldn't? The answer, of course, is the same for both questions: functional design. An functional design in small sailboats in many respects is diametrically the opposite of popular misconceptions of the subject. Many people want their 17-foot ZIPPO to look like a scaled-down RANGER - and then wonder why the boat won't get out of its own way. If you were going to build a small office building in Podunk you wouldn't scale down the Empire State Building, complete with all 93 floors and express elevators. Now, would you?

Small-boat designs fall into two general categories: Those designed for cheapness and those designed for the best performance. It used to be that a heavy chine boat could be built cheaper than a light round-bilge boat with its narrow planks, tiny ribs and myriad of fastenings. Also, the chine construction was better adapted to the back yard builder. But it is not possible, with chine construction, for the designer to give the lovely flowing lines such as are found in a good round-bilge design. For construction with heavy wide planking the curves must be simple and easy. The resulting boat is sturdy but clumsy and heavy.

The popularity of the pre-molded-hull one-designs, "40 Million Frenchmen can't be wrong", led many sailors to believe that that type of design actually was superior. If so, why are not the 6-Meters, 8-Meters, J's and other fine yachts built this way? I never have known of a chine hull which I considered to have the all-around good handling and sailing qualities of a good round-bilge design.

The advent of the molded hull changed all this. Built by production methods using thin veneers which can be formed to any reasonable shape, the molded hull can be built to the very best lines. Because of its strength it can be built much lighter, without floors and frames, effecting a saving of hundreds of pounds of materials. As a result, the modern round-bilge molded boat can be built for the price of the chine boat or less, and now is coming into her own.

Why has the THISTLE a plumb bow and transom instead of the racy-looking overhangs of a 22 Sq. Meter? Length in the water, water-line length, is the all-important single factor in performance. A good long boat always will trim an equally good short boat.

Here the public is misled by the fact that most of the larger yachts, such as the 22 Sq. Meter, are designed to comply with a water-line rule, and would not be that way if the designer were concerned solely with building the best boat of that same over-all length. But in designing a new one-design-class boat, we are trying to give the most boat within a given over-all length, and the greatest use of length will be found with a plumb stem and transom.

Now a word about the THISTLE's other controversial feature, her lack of decking. Why isn't she decked in? Decking is used for two main reasons: for structural strength to tie the hull together, and to shed water. The THISTLE is adequately tied together by her interior members, the grating, seats, etc., without decking. Does she need it to shed water? Is decking desirable in itself if it is not needed?

This latter is somewhat controversial, partly a matter of personal preference like the man who kissed the cow. There are those who maintain that a boat should have decking to make her look like a sailboat. So be it. Seems to me there should be other things. Yet I have noticed that the boosters of another class sometimes criticize the THISTLE's lack of decking, yet stress the roominess of their boat - which is not as roomy as the THISTLE. You cannot have both a roomy cockpit and a wide deck.

Does the THISTLE need decking? No. Many boats, especially heavy boats with low freeboard forward, will take solid water over the bow in a big sea. Many, lacking lift forward, will "submarine" on a reach or run in a heavy wind. Such boats need decking to keep them from swamping. I think it often is the sailors of such boats who, shuddering to think how their boats behave, are most emphatic about decking on the THISTLE.

The plain fact of the case is that a properly designed boat does not do such things, and does not need decking. The THISTLE has a fine entrance which slices through the waves. She has a full bow with plenty of freeboard and good flare. She is light in weight and, without decking, is light in the bow. Consequently she does not plunge under, does not take solid water over her bow, does not throw up great showers of spray. It is now well proven that even without decking, she sails drier than other fast boats. (It has been written that anyone can design a dry slow boat).

The case against decking the THISTLE is that she certainly is roomier, lighter in weight, easier to maintain because everything is accessible; there is no decking to require maintenance; she is less costly to build. The jib and spinnaker stow down inside when they are lowered. In picking up your mooring you are down inside and not falling off a slippery deck. Etc., etc.

The THISTLE is just as functional as I could make her. For myself, I prefer a boat which sails like a fast boat to one which only looks like one. There is no sham in the THISTLE design. The proof of the pudding is that she has proved herself to be a pretty good all-around boat. The time probably will come when a new design will out-class her but at this writing it does not appear to be imminent. Who knows?