

**A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO HURRICANES**

# SAIL

NOVEMBER 1991

**THE CAPE VERDES**  
**Don Street visits**  
**unspoiled islands**

**Cal 20 comeback:**  
**Old design gains**  
**a new following**

A CAHNERS PUBLICATION



\$2.50 \$3.00 Canada

# Bringing back an

Now in its third decade, the Cal 20, a bathtub-shaped fiberglass mini-cruiser, is enjoying an unexpected and robust renaissance

**W** By Shimon-Craig Van Collie

hen an East Coast friend recently asked Bruce Golison of Long Beach, California, what boat he was currently campaigning, the former Mallory Cup and Prince of Wales Bowl winner said that he was having a great time with his Cal 20. The reaction on the other end of the line was a guffaw, followed by the question "What are you, hard up for trophies or something?"

The Cal 20, now celebrating its thirtieth year since it came off the board of Southern California designer Bill Lapworth, has been undergoing a renaissance. The class, which always enjoyed a "working-class" popularity, now attracts some of the West Coast's top skippers, including Golison, Dave Ullman, and Steve Grillon.

At first sight, one wonders how this 20-foot-long, bathtub-shaped fiberglass mini-cruiser could evoke such interest. For all intents and purposes, it is undercanvased and overweight. More often than not, it's raced without a spinnaker in class competition.

These were my thoughts as I walked the docks at the Alamitos Bay Yacht Club in Long Beach, looking at a fleet of 55 Cal 20s that had come for the North American Championship in early August. It wasn't until I was out

on the race course, beyond the narrow entrance to Long Beach Harbor and inside the Los Angeles breakwater, that I began to realize the appeal.

The boat handles not unlike a large El Toro or Sabot or Dyer Dinghy. It can change course quickly (in this case because of its large rudder and fin keel), but once you settle in a straight line the thrills dissipate. Lacking much horsepower, you never move over 5 knots. Given any kind of breeze, you don't go much slower than that, either.

This one-speed-fits-all feature produces something that has been noticeably absent in much of my sailing in recent years—tactical exercise. So much of high-tech sailing, be it on ultralights or sailboards or Ultimate 30s or even International Offshore Rule (IOR) or International Measurement System (IMS) boats, tends to be an exotic and expensive form of drag racing where you simply put the pedal to the metal and see who gets there first. With the Cal 20 you have to think your way around the course.

"This is one fleet where once you get behind, it's very hard to recover," says Dave Ullman, a 470 and Lido 14 champion, who isn't used to seeing transoms no matter what boat he sails. "All the changes you make result in only minor speed differences."

**A**FTER A THREE-RACE ELIMINATION series, Ullman, Golison, and 28 others qualified for the Gold Fleet for the North American title. Sailing with class president Dave Ellis of Long Beach, I found myself in the Silver Fleet, thanks to our grabbing a large clump of kelp on our keel on the first beat and hitting the first weather mark in the remaining two heats. The quality of competition among the also-rans was better than I expected, in large part because of the presence of many of the class veterans.

Perhaps the most charming was



Isabelle Lounsberry, who eventually placed second in the Silver Fleet. She is a sweetheart of a strawberry blond who could easily pass as the yacht-club grandmother. She bought her Cal 20, hull #400, with her husband, George, back in 1965. They helped found the Alamitos Bay fleet, which remains one of the most active.

"Originally, the boat was intended

# oldie



for a man and a woman to race and cruise some," she says. "George and I used to trade off at the helm."

Her husband's death in 1971 left Isabelle as the skipper, a role she's ably filled. Racing became her primary interest, and she tossed out her nonessential gear. A year and a half ago she had the boat souped up, a practice that has become the class rage.

"Turbocharging" is the phrase some use for this process, which involves removing the keel and turning the hull upside down so it can be refaired. The cast-iron bulb keel is sandblasted and refaired to a class-maximum thickness of 1.5 inches. For those boats that need it (Isabelle's didn't), waterlogged sections, such as the plywood under the fiberglass deck,

are removed and replaced. Once reassembled, the boat is rigged. On turbocharged boats the factory-issue jib leads are rapidly being replaced by athwartship tracks reminiscent of IOR deck layouts of the mid-1980s. Three control lines—inboard and outboard

**Close racing, not design aesthetics, dominates the North Americans**

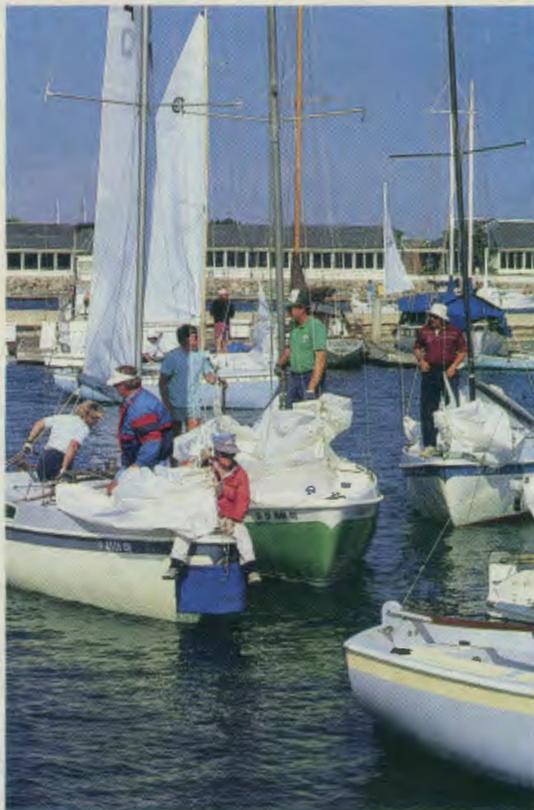


Cal 20 class racing is most often without spinnakers (left). Traffic jam at Alamitos Bay YC (below)

on the car(s) and up and down on the sheet(s) to adjust clew height—allow instant and infinite jib adjustment.

According to Mike George and Steve Brown, active racers in the class for the past decade and each of whom now has his own refurbishing business, the Cal 20 market bottomed out in the early 1980s. By then the boat had been out of production for six years, and many of the 1,960 hulls that had been built by Jensen Marine sat idle. Layoffs in the Southern California aerospace industry forced prices down, and sailors looked around for an affordable alternative to the expensive IOR. By the mid-1980s a thousand bucks would get you a hull, and another five or six grand could put your boat on the starting line in solid contention (including a new set of sails).

Of course, given the opportunity, there are those who will outspend the next guy in hopes of gaining a competitive edge. A few boats at the North Americans looked as if they had just rolled off the factory floor, but their glossy gelcoats and internally led controls didn't produce enough advantages to make a difference in the standings. Fortunately, after a certain price, only the cosmetics improve.



**S**PEED REFINEMENTS WEREN'T OUR CONCERN on *Peppermint*, Dave Ellis's 1974 model. We were at first too busy working out our *pas de deux* to worry about looks, but by the final elimination heat we began to hit our stride.

Approaching the starboard-tack layline close to the finish, we were lee-bowed by Marty Burke, the Cal 20 class secretary, in his hull #370, *Tie Tie II*, with crew Don Burt. Thinking he didn't have the room to tack and

clear us, we were surprised when he did so with a few feet to spare. Discouraged, we continued on for another 20 yards and flopped over ourselves. Our hopes were rebuoyed when we saw the finish line slanted in our favor. I alternately peeked under the boom at Burke and judged the distance to the finish, finally calling for Dave to shoot head-to-wind after we cleared the committee boat's stern. Over the sound of the flapping sails, we heard the race committee announce our number first. Even though we fared badly in the war, we took some satisfaction in having at least won a skirmish.

After Dave's regular crew raced in the first two Silver Fleet heats, I came back aboard, and we settled into some exciting racing. Dave concentrated on the driving while I trimmed the jib (including setting the whisker pole downwind) and analyzed the rest of the fleet. We fell into a groove and found ourselves consistently in the top third of the fleet, including an exhilarating fifth in the penultimate race where it seemed we could do little wrong.

Skipper Ellis represents the heart and soul of the Cal 20 fleet. An engineer at Rockwell International, he enjoyed surfing as a youngster. Marriage and four children changed his lifestyle, however, and sailing boats became his hobby. Twelve years ago he bought his first Cal 20, basing his decision on its reasonable price and the opportunities for both one-design racing and family cruising. The Ellises haven't done much of the latter—those who have done it describe it as not unlike camping out in the smallest closet in your house—but Dave enjoys himself on the race course. He figures that between the schedules at Long Beach and at Cabrillo Beach at the north end of the Los Angeles breakwater, he can get a Cal 20 starting gun about 50 times a year.

Up ahead in the Gold Fleet, Bruce Golison assumed the early lead in the championship series with consistent seconds and thirds. On the last day he faltered, however, and young Bill Fortenberry pounced into the lead with two brilliant firsts. After coming ashore, however, Fortenberry's yacht-club membership, a requirement for

the regatta, was questioned. Fortenberry had mailed off a check to a nearby club at the last minute, but until he could prove his status, the race committee was reluctant to hand over the North American title. Fortenberry produced a confirmation letter a few days later and got the prize.

**E**NFORCEMENT OF CLASS RULES, AS THE Fortenberry case illustrates, has become one of the Cal 20's major political issues. One-design parameters are another. Bill Lapworth admits that the pocket cruiser was never intended as a strict one-design. In fact, there were three versions of the boat built over its 13-year production history. Early models had a solid plywood bulkhead under the deck-stepped mast. Later versions featured a mahogany beam under the deck supported by two stainless-steel posts, which opened up the forward V-berth area. Deck layouts were never formalized. Most disturbing is that class rules do not specify a minimum weight.

"It's the worst thing about the class," admits Bruce Williams of Long Beach, the Cal 20 national measurer for the past year and the class president-elect. "Hulls that we've weighed average about 1,700 pounds, but there can be as much as a 10 percent variation. If we don't establish some minimum, we'll lose those people who can't or don't want to work to reduce weight in their boats."

Some of the alterations have been beneficial, such as the recent abolishment of the forward lower shroud. The stay served no real functional purpose and only chewed up the jib leech. Keel fairing has helped standardize the appendages. Some of the original factory keels lacked quality control and were bent, twisted, or asymmetrical. Those reworked by Mike George, Steve Brown, and Stan Teel are more alike than dissimilar. Likewise, the high-density foam rudders now available are coming from a limited number of molds. As one longtime Cal 20 sailor put it, "We're just fortunate that the boats were all made by one builder; otherwise they'd be all over the map!"

Williams, whose youthful blond appearance belies his experience with boat repair and maintenance, has preached a credo of "repair, don't reengineer" during his reign as measurer. If, through use or neglect, a

part of the boat needed fixing, he advocated just that. He took issue with those who tried to restructure rather than repair their boats, such as bonding the inherently weak cockpit hatch area to the hull for more support.

"They're making a different boat when they do that," says Williams. "Lapworth wasn't an idiot. He designed a good boat. It's just that they're old now."

It's hard not to find examples of sailors who grew up in a class with a 30-year history. Steve Grillon of Redondo Beach, one of the top grand-prix racers in the world, recalls that his first race ever was aboard his

**The only way to break out of the pack (below) is with tactics**

father's Cal 20 in 1971. Ten years later he won the Nationals. On the third-decade anniversary, he figured it was appropriate that he join the class again. He borrowed a boat for the North Americans, but he's also bought one of his own that he's fixing up. He, too, is tired of the grind of big-boat sailing and looks forward to good competition in the class.

Current Alamitos Bay fleet captain Jennifer Ellis (no relation to Dave) belongs to another multigenerational Cal 20 family. In fact, between Jennifer and her father, the Ellises have owned hulls #232, 236, and 238. The latter is her current boat, called *Hot Pink* (with an appropriately colored gunwale stripe). Her father, who once was her skipper, now serves as crew.

Perhaps the most emphatic sign that something is definitely happening in this fleet is the presence at the North Americans of the teenagers on hull #103, *Eight Ball*.

Owner Scott Wilson,

16, and his crew, J.T. Wilburn, 16, and Mike Murdoch, 15, have caught Cal 20 fever. As many advertising executives have discovered over the years, as Southern California teens go, so goes the nation—if not the world.

"It's pretty refreshing to see their excitement," notes Bruce Golison. "To me, this is basically just another regatta, but to them it's the end of the world. The sport of sailing needs that kind of enthusiasm."

The Long Beach youngsters aren't about to give up their Sabot, Laser, Flying Junior, or Laser II sailing, but they know a cool boat and a cool class when they see one. "They're great all-around boats, and I'm learning about sailing bigger boats," says skipper Wilson. "All the good sailors are here. This is where it's at!"



*Freelance writer/journalist Shimon-Craig Van Collie of Berkeley, California, has enjoyed slow, tactical one-design racing since he raced Blue Jays on Long Island Sound in the 1960s.*



## MORE INFO

For more information about the Cal 20 Class, contact Dave Ellis, 3848 Sebren, Long Beach, CA 90808; tel. 213-429-6358; or Bruce Williams, 2264 Grand Ave., Long Beach, CA 90815; tel. 213-498-0184. For used-boat information, contact Steve Brown, Cal 20 News Editor, 415 29th Street, Newport Beach, CA 92663; tel. 714-675-1505.

The 1992 Cal 20 North Americans will be held at King Harbor Yacht Club in Los Angeles in July. If you want action sooner, try the Southern California Yachting Association's Midwinter Regatta in late January 1992.

*Results: Gold Fleet—(1) Bill Fortenberry, San Diego, CA 11¼; (2) Bruce Golison, Long Beach, CA, 17; (3) Shawn Bennett, Long Beach, CA, 21¾; (4) Stan Yocum, San Pedro, CA, 24¼; (5) Dave Ullman, Newport Beach, CA, 32¾*

*Silver Fleet—(1) David Williams, Glendale, CA, 9¼; (2) Isabelle Lounsbury, Long Beach, CA, 10½; (3) John Nootboom, Tiburon, CA, 28; (4) R. Chris Wells, Long Beach, CA, 31; (5) Bill Unjack, Huntington Beach, CA, 35*