

A Short History of an Ideal Solution

BY KEN MURPHY



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Nearly thirty years ago, a few members of Pequot Yacht Club took a bold act of risk, innovation and leadership.

In these uncertain days, we have come to cherish that which we might have almost taken for granted a short time ago.

This feeling intensifies as summer approaches. The aroma of burgers frying on a balmy Wednesday night, infusing the buzz of conversation on a crowded lower deck. The stately parade of big boats returning from their races, followed by the diligent committee aboard the faithful Pequod. And, as evening falls, the soft cloud of white dacron that steals home by the last puffs of a fading sunset southerly. The Ideal 18s are back from their dueling, just in time to enjoy the last mouthwatering offerings from the smoking grill behind the tent.

Thousands of sailors along the Sound and down the east coast organize their summers around these small, handy sailboats, the Ideal 18s. But most of those who sail them don't realize that it was a bold act of risk,

innovation and leadership on the part of a few Pequot Yacht Club members that got the ball rolling nearly thirty years ago.

It was Ted Jennings who led the quest to find the perfect boat that would provide fun, competitive racing for the many, rather than an athletic trial the highly skilled few. He wanted a boat that could serve both older and younger sailors, be stable enough for beginners (*read: not capsize!*) while offering genuine challenge for the experienced sailor.

In the early 1990s, Ted spotted a potential answer in a new design just coming out from upstate New York, and built in Oakville, Ontario. Frank Shumway, founder of Shumway Marine in Rochester, had just completed hull #41 of their new production boat, the Ideal 18. The design came from the pen of the legendary Bruce Kirby, known as having first sketched his world famous Laser on a yellow legal pad —

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his “million dollar doodle,” as he called it. Frank had gone to Bruce with similar requirements as those sought by Ted Jennings. As Frank’s son, Skip Shumway, reflected, “Mom and Dad sailed Bullseyes in Florida. Dad was looking for something that would be competitive, but more comfortable. And he didn’t want a planing boat where the first to round would run away with race.” The resulting design entered the world as the Ideal 18.

Ted and a small team at Pequot arranged the first New England trial of the new boats. Skip Shumway remembers: “My buddies and I left Rochester around 5 p.m. on a fall night in 1992, trailing a few boats in a caravan. We rolled in to Southport at midnight. We were so revved by the drive down; we just stayed up and spent the rest of the night rigging the boats. By the time Pequot members showed up early the next morning, there they were—on the dock, ready to go.”

The Ideals were an instant hit. Sailors of all experience levels took to them immediately. The design suited the Club’s needs perfectly, but it was a further innovation that really provided the foundation for both the enduring Pequot program, and the explosion of Ideal 18 racing up and down the east coast.

The boat was great, but how best to unite this versatile vessel with eager sailors? As Hugh Smith remembers, “financing was the key.” This was the second major step: the creation of a member-financed club ownership program that would allow many sailors to use the Ideals without having to buy a boat themselves. “There were seven of us that put up the money,” recalls Hugh. “Bob Larsen did a terrific job in helping to design the financing. Then we beat the bushes to sign up fee-paying members into the

program.” The plan took off beyond expectations. “The original seven investors were paid back inside of the first year — that’s how well it worked,” said Hugh.

What began at Pequot Yacht Club in 1992 spread like wildfire through the Long Island Sound sailing community. Clubs up and down the coast wanted to know all about the new boats, and especially about the financial mechanics of our unique club ownership program. In 1993, US Sailing recognized Pequot Yacht Club as “One-Design Club of The Year” for the Ideal 18 introduction. Both this capable racing boat and the unique method of club acquisition took off in tandem. Today, over three hundred Ideal 18s race at thirty-two sailing clubs. “We’ve even got a fleet in the Canary Islands,” says Skip Shumway. “We had one in the BVI, but Irma blew them all away.”

Twenty-eight years later, Pequot Yacht Club is on their third fleet of Ideal 18s (our second sails on at Black Rock Yacht Club). Our waterfront crew keeps the fleet in top shape for racing that goes on nearly five days out of seven in the summer season. “They’re rugged little boats, and that’s been a big part of their success,” says Hugh.

Ask an Ideal 18 sailor from Pequot just what the boat and the program have come to mean to them, and you get an earful. “It’s the relationships, really,” says Katie Montgomery. “This program really does turn perfect strangers into lifelong friends.” Instruction, enjoyment and the thrill of competition are all goals of the program. Katie reflects, “before discovering the Ideals, I never thought of competing on a boat. Now, I can’t imagine just ‘going for a sail’. It’s such a great feeling when you do well in a race. Yet, its all so respectful and fun, and the learning we get with Evan’s guidance is just terrific.”

Sounds almost Ideal. ■



MIKE VIRR AND RHYS GOFF



KRISTI MARSHALL AND
KATIE MONTGOMERY

TODAY, OVER THREE HUNDRED IDEAL 18s RACE AT
THIRTY-TWO SAILING CLUBS.

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