

Knocking on heaven's door: knockabouts competing in Fox Islands Thorofare between North Haven and Vinalhaven.



There were prizes for sailors of all ages at the conclusion of North Haven's 100th-anniversary knockabout regatta.

Ten Minutes in an Old-Style Knockabout

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY ART PAINE

GROWING UP on the waters of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, I was blessed with the joy of seeing and sailing almost all of Nat Herreshoff's popular one-design classes. I spent many glorious windy afternoons tugging on the tiller of an S-boat, throwing those big, bronze Highfield running-backstay levers, and worrying about the cost of replacing that gorgeous curved mast. Ashore, I wore out many No.2 Pedigree pencils drawing pictures of Herreshoff 15s prettily ghosting along at impressive speed above their abstract reflections.

Although my move to Maine brought me inevitably within sight of Crowninshield knockabouts, I had never actually sailed one until last summer, when I was photographing the 100th anniversary knockabout regatta at North Haven. Polly Saltonstall kindly suggested that I try my hand at *Frolic*, the pretty, bright-red knockabout that she had had rebuilt by Rockport's Artisan Boatworks (see the review of Artisan's latest new design on page 73 of this issue). I was pleased to note that she seemed to feel that my evaluation of her boat would be meaningful.

I had, mind you, already taken note that all the boats in the regatta were fitted with remarkably spindly little tillers of minimum length. My mind's eye had been comparing these boats with the Wianno Senior, which looks nearly the same size, is similarly gaff rigged, and, other than being a center-boarder, appears to be a close relation. *Frolic's* delicate little tiller, however, would last but a moment in a Wianno. On some days on Buzzards Bay, where many Wiannos can be found, it's all you can do, sailing one, to keep your arms in their sockets.

Why not a big, hefty tiller on *Frolic*? I learned why off North Haven.

I don't have sufficient words to describe the intense delight of that short sail. Taking the little tiller in my hand and feeling a refined thing like *Frolic* come alive must be similar to a symphony conductor merely twitching his little baton and, magically, inspiring crescendos and diminuendos of pure sound.

You don't maneuver a knockabout, you whip it around! You play with the peak of the gaff and create any sail shape your sailor's heart desires. The pressure on the main speaks to you; it tells you what the boat wants to do as much as your pulling or easing of the sheet tells the boat what you want it to do.

I sailed *Frolic* for all of ten minutes, and those were among the best ten minutes of my life (in a daysailer). Returning, I shot that beauty into the wind and we glided for what seemed like miles. I backed the main hard at the last moment, and the boat behaved and came to rest. I bounded onto the dock with the bow painter in my hand. I was totally at peace with myself, with North Haven, the Atlantic, and the World.

Polly greeted me with her arms folded and a wry, knowing look on her face like the cat that had swallowed the canary. ✨

Art Paine is a writer, painter, photographer, and long-time Contributing Editor to *Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors* magazine.