

Two Ideal Daysailers: The WH 15 and the LS 30



Jamie Bloomquist

Capacious cockpit and finely balanced helm: the Watch Hill 15, built by the Artisan Boatworks of West Rockport to an original design by Nat Herreshoff.

Answers to
the question,
“What would
you buy?”

BY ART PAINE

A FEW WEEKS AGO I was sailing with a client in Southwest Harbor. Along came a magnificent Hinckley daysailer under mainsail alone. The peak of the main must have reached 30 feet above ours, and we were sailing a 43-footer! Looking like a million bucks, the yacht passed us as if we were standing still.

My job of the moment was teaching a new owner how to safely and confidently command and navigate his newly purchased yacht. “Art,” the owner asked, “what do you think of these daysailer-yachts?” And then he asked, “If you had all the money in the world for a daysailer, what would you buy?”

I love questions like that, because they allow me to indulge my nautical fantasies without spending a cent.

In answer to the first question I said that as much as I adore the looks and luxury of those big daysailers, for me they represent too great a commitment for just knocking around in. They all have berths, engines, enclosed heads, and galleys ranging from rudimentary to elaborate. All that is very nice, to be sure, but if all the time I could spare for summer leisure is an afternoon once in awhile, I wouldn’t necessarily need a hull with accommodations that could take me to Bermuda, nice as they might be. Furthermore, I’m a stick-and-rudder guy, and many of those high-end daysailer-yachts are steered by wheel.

In answer to the second question, I said I probably wouldn’t buy a daysailer; rather I would design and build a unique boat for

myself. The truth is, however, that when push came to shove I'd likely fail to find the time, so I discussed two very different styles of daysailer, the best possible examples of which are built right here in Maine.

The first thing I'd do, then, is phone and reserve a time slot in the schedule of Artisan Boatworks in West Rockport, and ask that the boat they would build for me would closely resemble their Watch Hill 15. Here is my reasoning:

Given only an afternoon in which the wind comes up and I want to sail, I know that I'd prefer a wooden boat, for three reasons. First, I just love the stuff against my skin, the acoustics of water striking and gurgling past it. Second, I love a boat with a light and lively feel—on a tiller, a tiller that's a bit delicate, with a nice oval handgrip at the end. Third, for the same reason I'd love to drive a vintage Mustang or MGTD, I see virtue in being custodian of something recognizably classic, the best of something from the past.

For 30 years of my life I'd probably have chosen a Herreshoff S-boat. During my nautical childhood on Narragansett Bay, I grew up with S-boats being the premier class of racing sailboats there. Their owners were exalted in my mind to the status of princes and

Not just anybody can replicate a Herreshoff yacht, as the plans are not generally made available to the public.

kings. In a newly published book—*Sloop*, by Daniel Robb—a Cape Cod boatbuilder was described comparing a Herreshoff 12½-footer to an S-boat. “The twelve-and-a-half was a Volvo,” the builder said, “whereas this thing [the S-boat] was an Aston Martin Lagonda!”

Yes, I could ask Artisan Boatworks to build me an S-boat, and given the quality of their work, the only thing of value it would lack would be an authentic, numbered builder's plaque from the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company. But when I saw AB's version of a Watch Hill 15, it stole my heart away.

I must interject that not just anybody can replicate a Herreshoff yacht, or certain designs from Crowninshield or Fife, as the plans are not generally available to the public. For many years it was virtually impossible to gain access in particular to Herreshoff lines and offsets, since they were sequestered with severe restrictions at the Hart Nautical Museum at M.I.T. In recent years the wishes of the Herreshoff family have been interpreted in such a way that a few highly qualified boatbuilding professionals can be granted the use of the plans, for a fee. Among the select is Alec Brainerd of Artisan Boatworks.

That's a good reason to go to Artisan to have my personal Watch Hill 15 built.

Another is that Brainerd works closely with customers to make small, carefully vetted changes. Of course, being a designer, I'd insist on the incorporation of a few select, personal touches. Who else, for instance, would entertain putting a gaff rig on a Watch Hill 15, as I'd prefer? But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The Watch Hill 15 was one of several boats that came off molds first set up in 1898 for the Buzzards Bay 15 at the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company in Bristol, Rhode Island. (Most such boats in that era were named for their waterline length; the overall length of the various 15s came to just a bit more than 23 feet overall.)

Over a long span of time other variants came off the same molds, including such one-designs as the E-boats and the Herreshoff 15. Nat Herreshoff had a practical, almost blue-collar approach to turning a profit; he'd use any opportunity to craft a boat from his molds. Although nearly all the boats from the original Buzzards Bay 15 molds became centerboard or keel-centerboard models, several full-

keel versions were built, too. One was *Flicker*, now owned by Maynard Bray of Brooklin.

The Watch Hill 15 was built in 1920 at the request of the yacht club in Watch Hill, Rhode Island, an exclusive summer

added a critical two inches of freeboard aft, with no change at the bow. Second, he switched to the much simpler and arguably more weatherly Marconi rig. This is substantially the same rig as we see on the plans of the Artisan Boatworks takeoff.

Interestingly, the Watch Hill Yacht club still sails the WH-15 as their signature class. Most of their boats are now fiberglass, although they happily invite true classic wooden WH-15s to join their races and have extended the same invitation to the recently launched Maine variant. Doubtless the yacht club's modern 15s would be fastest, both because of their high-aspect-ratio fractional rig set on a double-spreader aluminum mast and their full spinnaker.

The first Maine Watch Hill 15 was built rather conventionally but used the West System approach. It is single planked, and thus on the inside it looks just like a carvel-planked wooden boat (a real plus for me). The exterior is epoxied in such a way as to minimize maintenance.

WATCH HILL 15

LOA 24' 6"

LWL 15'

Beam 6' 8"

LWL 19' 7"

Draft 2' 3" board up

Draft 5' 6" board down

Sail Area 303 sq. ft.

Displ. approx. 2,200 lbs.

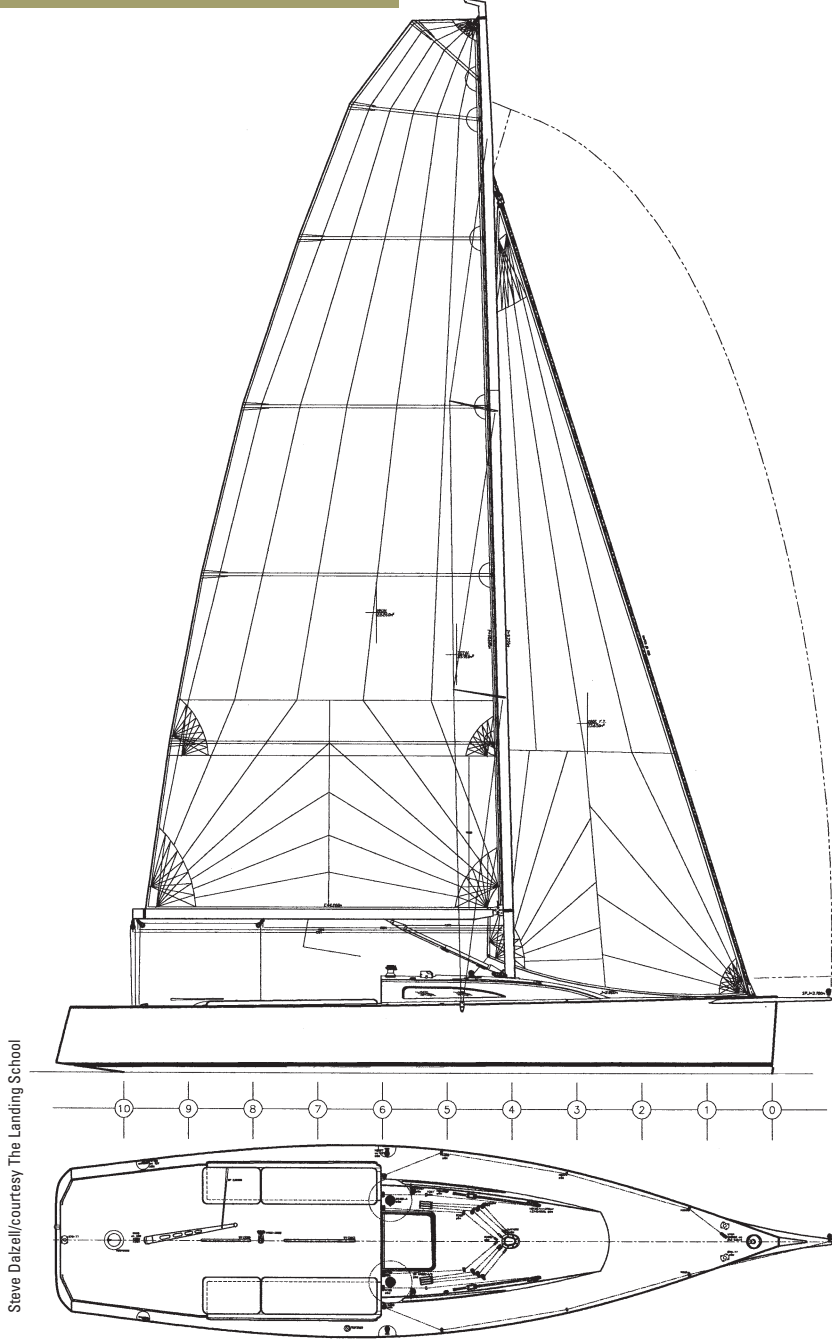
BUILDER: ARTISAN BOATWORKS

410 Main Street, Rockport, ME, 04856

207-236-4231; www.artisanboatworks.com

Photo gallery & video: maineboats.com

resort. Nat Herreshoff made two significant changes to the design of boats he'd been taking off the same molds for 20-plus years. Because he noted that the H-15s and Buzzards Bay 15s sometimes would bury their afterdecks at speed, he



Steve Datzell/courtesy The Landing School

LANDING SCHOOL 30

LOA	27' 10"
LOW	25'
Beam	7' 4.25"
Draft	6'
Displ.	4,073 lbs.
Ballast	1,825 lbs.
Sail Area	506 sq. ft.
Power	10-hp Yanmar diesel (inboard)

DESIGNER/BUILDER:
The Landing School, P.O. Box 1490,
Kennebunkport, ME 04046
207-985-7976
www.landingschool.edu

Alec Brainerd worked with the owner, an architect from Vermont and Nantucket, to customize the design somewhat. The forward bulkhead was moved ahead one frame bay, which allows a better opening into the forward compartment and a more commodious cockpit. (From my personal knowledge of the type, I can say that the boat will benefit from weight being moved forward, thus depressing the bow a little.) There are airtight compartments both forward and aft, making for an unsinkable boat. That's great for a light (about

2,200 lbs), somewhat tender, lively boat with a non-self-bailing cockpit.

I'd have all those modifications in my own boat, with just a couple of additions. I'd go back to a gaff rig only because I love the look of it on this hull. I'd keep the ease of a self-tacking club jib, but I might instead steal the

I have the soul of a dinghy-racer, whetted by team racing on the Upper River Thames in England.

approach Morris took on their daysailer. Their curved traveler track and method of rigging affords instant and effortless tacking while gaining some camber in the foot of the jib. And I would add a little removable cabin affair that would sit right on top of the coaming forward and open out the sides of the fore bulkhead in such a way that two could sleep aboard. This vee-front cabinette would, when in place, make the boat very similar to the S-boat.

Bringing my fantasies to their most fanciful fruition, I would put my brand-new, aquamarine-colored, Maine-built Watch Hill 15, with its nicely stowable gaff rig parts and pieces, into a large box and ship it to Staniel Cay, in the Bahamian Exumas. Then I'd proceed to take full advantage of the shoal draft, carving a sinuous path over miles of sandy bottom, perhaps even learn to fly-fish after bonefish.

Or not.

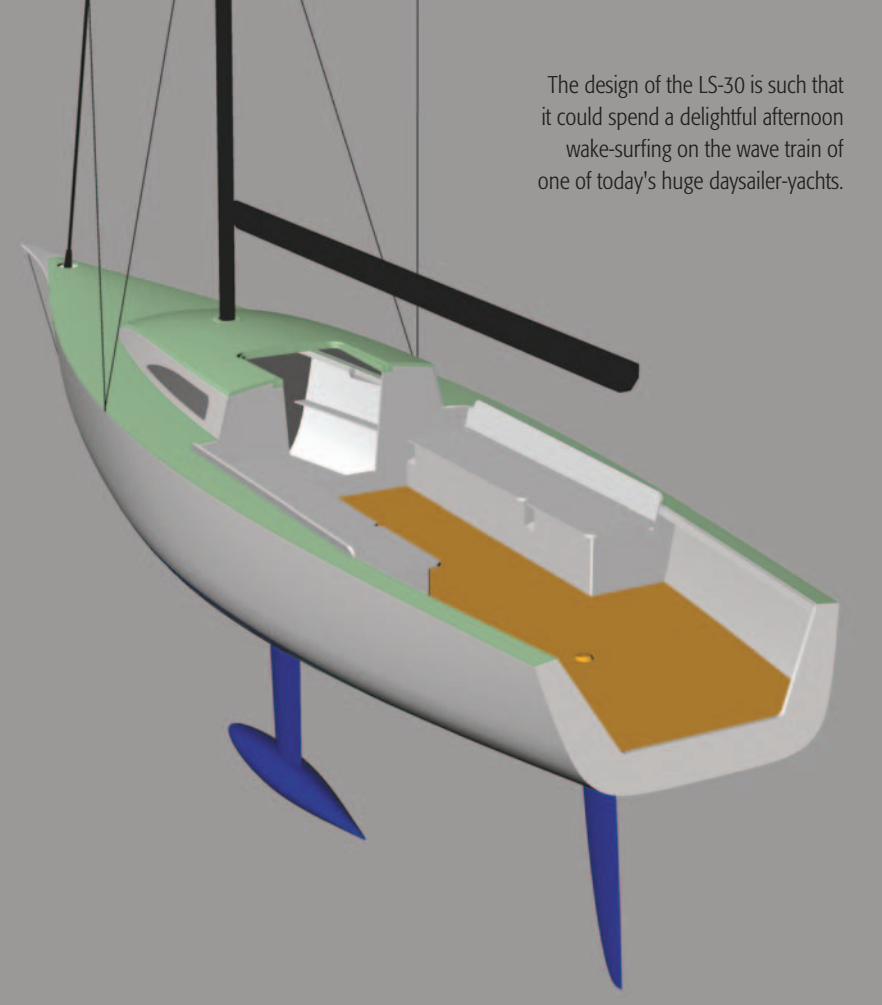
Maybe when I called Artisan Boatworks to reserve building time their phone would be busy, or I'd get their answering machine. Since I abhor such latter devices, my reaction would probably be to call the Landing School in Kennebunkport instead. Perhaps I would buy one of the first of their newly designed Landing School 30s.

The Landing School is Maine's "upwest" (relative to downeast) college-accredited learning institution for the nautically inclined. The education they provide in boat design, boatbuild-

ing, and systems engineering is second to none. As part of their combined design and boat construction program, the school has produced and offered for sale several proprietary designs over the years. These have ranged from small skiffs to rather difficult and complex large boats, power and sail. Their latest project, chosen in the interest of researching the technical extremes of composite construction, is an ultra-modern so-called “sport-sailboat.”

The LS-30, at about 28 feet in length, is only a little longer than the Watch Hill 15. (The “30” in the name refers to the length of the boat with its fixed carbon-fiber bowsprit.) While I see it as a boat that would be fun to sail, with it I’d surely have to ditch my shallow-water Bahama fantasies, because it has an ultra-thin, bulbed, laminar-flow-foiled, deep keel. And before I bought it I’d have to take it for a test drive through Muscongus Bay on a full ebb tide to see if that forward-projecting bulb would catch a lobster-trap warp. (Strangely

courtesy The Landing School



The design of the LS-30 is such that it could spend a delightful afternoon wake-surfing on the wave train of one of today's huge daysailer-yachts.

enough, I have actually done this with a similar boat with a similar keel, but bagged nothing. Maybe the extreme speed simply melts through the warps.)

The LS-30 was designed by Steve Dalzell, the Landing School's design director. Dalzell is newly imported from England, which perhaps explains why the boat is quite narrow—a tradition of long-standing in the Channel. Surely this will be an exciting project for the school. Their curriculum has a specialty in composites technology; surely they need such technology to cipher a boat this long that will soak up the strains of a sail plan in excess of 500 square feet. (Don't even ask about the area with the asymmetrical spinnaker included.)

The LS-30 is dinghy-like in all respects, and that's what I love about it. I might race classic boats in Maine in excess of 70 feet, or even cruise to Bermuda in a 150-footer, but I have the soul of a dinghy-racer, bred in college, whetted by team racing in "fireflies" (12' Firefly class dinghies) on the Upper River Thames in England—where we had to invent a rule about calling "sea room" on wading cows, specifically about what the rule should say in the event they moved.

One big plus is that I could race the LS-30 in PHRF or IRC. In so doing, being a cheapskate, I'd almost surely sleep aboard; the boat has enough cabin for it, barely.

Specifications for the LS-30 include the option of a small inboard diesel engine. People who have read thus far might think I'm a purist. They might be duly shocked to learn that I think that, next to an electronic chart plotter, auxiliary power is a completely delightful accessory in a small sailboat. In fact, if DC motors and batteries weren't so deuced heavy, I would probably have mentioned an electric auxiliary for the Watch Hill 15.

Daysailing, at least for me, is best carried out in small boats for little bank accounts. These two Maine-built boats might be at either ragged edge of the envelope, but each in its own way would suit me to a T. I'll let the pictures and drawings tell the rest of the story. ✨

Art Paine is a writer, painter, photographer, and yacht designer who lives in Bernard, Maine.