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# T/T MARIE

*A tender balance of function and tradition*

Text by Matthew P. Murphy · Photographs by Benjamin Mendlowitz



To the casual observer, the 24' yacht tender T/T MARIE appears to be a 1920s-vintage Herreshoff creation. A bent-teak coaming surrounds a cozy passenger cockpit that seats 12 people. That cockpit is covered by a canvas surray top supported by sturdy and simple bronze stanchions. The boat's hardware is signature Herreshoff: unadorned bronze, and just enough of it, in just the right places. The forward helm station is equipped with a single-lever engine control and a simple bronze steering bar—a sort of steering-wheel-and-horizontal-tiller hybrid.

But when you step aboard this launch for the first time and prepare for an outing, there comes a dawning realization that there's something different here. First, that elegant surray top is too low: it would barely miss touching the heads of seated passengers of average height. But your captain opens a locker on the starboard side of the helm station and reaches into it. The motion of the hand in the locker activates a light that bathes the space in a warm glow. A simple controller with a cable leading back into the locker is withdrawn.

A button is pressed. The surray top slowly rises.

Guests are seated, and the engine is started. There is barely any sound at all coming from the engine compartment, which separates the passenger area from the helm. When the engine comes up to temperature, the lines are cast off and a wash of water, accompanied by the telltale grinding of a bow thruster, moves between the bow and the dock. You then notice two indistinct black buttons on the raw-teak sole at the operator's toes—the thruster controls.

The boat noses away from the dock and cruises through the anchorage at a stately displacement-boat speed. Then you exit the mooring field, and the faint whine of the engine rises in pitch—along with the bow and the boat's speed. You are planing. The chart plotter, which had been concealed at the dock by a finely finished wooden cover, is now exposed and illuminated. It registers 20 knots over the bottom. The mothership—a newly restored 1930s steel motoryacht—is anchored a mile offshore. You'll be aboard her in three minutes.

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**Above**—The 24' yacht tender T/T MARIE takes her styling cues from a vintage N.G. Herreshoff launch. But her planing hull and turbocharged diesel engine yield 20 knots at wide-open throttle, which is much faster than her predecessor.



**Above left**—T/T MARIE’s predecessor lands alongside her mothership, CORSAIR. **Above right**—The new launch is similar in concept to CORSAIR’s, but the stern is notably wider to create a planing surface. The forward helm station is vintage Herreshoff.

This new launch was conceived for a 130’ Consolidated motoryacht of 1934, which is currently being refitted. The owner wishes to remain anonymous, but his representative, Jon Barrett, was deeply involved from the very beginning of the project. His original idea was to replicate the 30’ launch designed and built in the 1930s by Herreshoff Mfg. Co. for J.P. Morgan’s opulent motoryacht, CORSAIR. That 30’ launch had a scant 7½’ beam, a plumb stem, and a sleek underwater profile meant to slip easily through the water—and not over it. It had a relatively deep forefoot that transitioned into a rather straight keel that was level for about the forward two-thirds of the boat’s length—then took a sudden swoop to meet the transom at the waterline. She was powered by an eight-cylinder Packard Junior engine. Passengers took their ease in a sheltered, high-windowed compartment aft. The operator stood forward—out in the weather, save for a collapsible dodger.

CORSAIR’s launch was, aesthetically, a good choice; it would look right at home on the deck of the Consolidated motoryacht. But there were modern exigencies to be considered. The first was the power: gasoline would not do in this age of better options. The owner, in fact, originally wanted an electric launch built closely to the original design. That boat would have topped out at 6–8 knots and had a limited range of operation. But what if the mothership were a mile or more offshore? There are occasions when a quick trip between mothership and shore is imperative. The launch would have to reach 20–22 knots—for a sustained time.

That changed everything. “The owner wanted to plane. That necessitated a chine hull,” said the naval architect Matt Smith of Barrington, Rhode Island, who designed the new launch. He

retained the bow profile and twin-cockpit arrangement of the original, and then cleaned the rest of the slate. The first step was to consider the power required to reach 20 knots. He settled on a 110-hp Yanmar diesel. “We located the engine where it needed to be, weight-wise,” he said, “and then worked out the bridge-deck arrangement.”

The boat would have a tunnel drive, but not for the usual reason of shallow running draft. Rather, she was to strike a low profile on the deck of the mothership. This also inspired some thinking about how to reduce the height of the passenger shelter when the boat was not in use, which in turn led to one of the more complex requirements of the project: the electronically activated survey top, which can be raised or lowered by the push of a button.

The problem itself was simple: Press a button, and the top goes up; press another button, and the top goes down. The solution, however, required some complexity: Inside each of the bronze support posts is a linear actuator—a ram, essentially, that pushes up or lowers the top, on command. But if the individual actuators operated at different speeds, the top would wrack and look bad, at best, and jam, at worst. Synchronizing the system required a computer, so that one telescoping actuator would not get ahead of another.



**To create a low profile when the launch is on the deck of the mothership, the survey top is easily lowered by means of a computer-synchronized system of actuators. Raising or lowering the top takes about 90 seconds.**



COURTESY OF ARTISAN BOATWORKS (BOTH)

**Above left**—The hull was built upside-down and then turned upright for fitting out. The bottom consists of fairly flat surfaces, so was built of plywood; the more-shapely topsides were strip-planked. **Above right**—The teak deck was vacuum-bagged to a plywood subdeck; hence, there are no mechanical fastenings. Teak Decking Systems was subcontracted for this job.

Artisan Boatworks of Rockport, Maine, built the boat. The Artisan shop is well known in classic-yacht circles for its impeccable Herreshoff reproduction sailboats, and the job was a great intellectual exercise for proprietor Alec Brainerd. “Spirit of Tradition hasn’t been fully explored in powerboats,” he said. Spirit of Tradition refers to a loose class of racing sailboats that borrow aesthetic elements from traditional yachts—particularly those of the 1920s and ’30s—and marries them to more modern underbodies and rigs. A Spirit of Tradition yacht might have the visually balanced, overhanging ends and sweeping sheer of a signature Sparkman & Stephens design, but below the waterline it would have a fin keel and spade rudder, and its rig would consist of carbon-fiber spars and Spectra rigging.

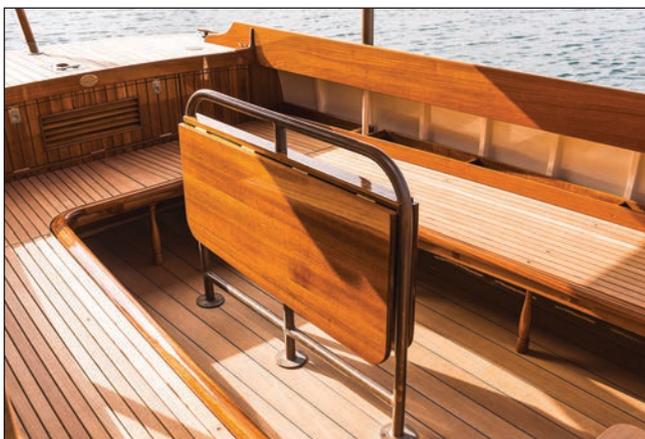
Artisan is no stranger to Spirit of Tradition yachts. Several years ago, the shop built the prototype W-22, a sporty little 22’ LOA sloop. And more recently they built the Sitka spruce mast for a 65’ Dave Pedrick-designed

sloop. That mast has modern-composite fabrications guiding its internal halyards, but is fitted out in polished stainless-steel hardware.

The new launch’s bottom is built of two layers of  $\frac{3}{8}$ ” plywood aft, where the shape changes minimally, and three layers of  $\frac{1}{4}$ ” plywood forward, where tighter bends were required. The topsides are tongue-and-groove strip-planked cedar. The hull exterior is sheathed in biaxial cloth set in epoxy; the interior is simply epoxy-coated. Sawn frames were fitted to the hull after planking, but they are mostly for looks. The skin of this boat is very strong.

The details and fitting out involved a symphony of subcontractors. Teak Decking Systems, the company specializing in laid teak decks, put down the deck and sole. Gemini Marine Canvas of Rockland, Maine, made the sloop top and dodger. Lyman-Morse Boatbuilding of nearby Thomaston did much of the metal

**Below left**—The bronze support structure for the folding cockpit table, along with the supports for the sloop top and other fabrications, were made by the yacht builder Lyman-Morse of Thomaston, Maine. The cockpit seats 12 passengers. **Below right**—The 110-hp Yanmar diesel engine was coated with white Awlgrip before installation. It sits on soft mounts and is coupled to an Aquadrive thrust bearing for nearly silent and vibration-free operation.





The helm station layout is faithful to the original, complete with the signature Herreshoff-style steering bar. The wooden lid adorned with the boat's name conceals a GPS plotter.

fabrication. J.M. Reineck & Son made the cast-bronze hardware. Of particular note among the many Herreshoff-pattern castings are the two folding lifting rings—one in the bow and one in the stern—that are used to lift and lower the boat to and from the mothership. They fold flush with the deck, and thus are remarkably unobtrusive to the overall aesthetic. “When I did all the engineering [for the lifting rings],” Smith said, “I used a safety factor of 5:1.” Thus, while the boat weighs 4,800 lbs empty, the system is engineered to handle 24,000 lbs.

The entire job was a careful balance of appearance and engineering, with the Artisan crew keeping an eye on the former and Smith tending to the latter. Brainerd, said Smith, “is the fashion police when it comes to boats. Aesthetics are very important to him.”

“There were so many details...,” Brainerd said. “There is not a square inch that didn’t have an hour of conversation around the right hardware, the right shape.” In many cases, it’s

what the eye does not see that matters. As Brainerd was giving me a tour of the boat, he called my attention to the hollow, Herreshoff-style cleat on the boat’s port quarter. The fuel tank vent, he told me, was plumbed into that cleat, eliminating the need for another piece of hardware. Such restraint, such echoing of the Herreshoff ethos, is at the heart of the Artisan Boatworks philosophy of craftsmanship. Brainerd likened it to engineering, in which an imbalance in a system can

Like the lowering surret-top, the tunnel in the boat’s bottom is meant to give the launch a low profile when it’s stored on deck. The tunnel is strip-planked. Just out of view at the top right-hand edge of this image is a trim wedge, which was added after initial sea trials.



COURTESY OF ARTISAN BOATWORKS



**Boatbuilder Greg Smith takes a turn at the helm. For several months last year, he worked alongside his Artisan Boatworks colleagues Freeland Ackert, Jerry Borowski, Ian Bruce, Alan Castonguay, and Zachary Hull to bring T/T MARIE to life.**

wreck its function: too big a pump can blow a valve in a plumbing system; excessive current draw in an electrical system will blow a fuse; too stiff a hull will tax a rig. “If you strike it right,” Brainerd said of a boat’s aesthetic details, “there’s no single detail that overpowers the rest.”

**M**ARIE was first launched in July 2017, and those initial sea trials were instructive: she ran a little bow-up, a condition Smith attributes to her tunnel, which creates a “down force” as it sucks in water. The boat has no trim tabs. They had been considered early in the project, but the idea was rejected on aesthetic grounds. Smith specified the addition of 8”-long wedges, ¾” at their thickest, all along the lower edge of the transom. These made the boat run a little flat, and so half of their length was cut away on each side. She now runs perfectly, as I learned on a cold day last April when I met Brainerd for an ice-cream-headache-inducing ride around Rockland Harbor.

At harbor speed, with no passengers in the aft cockpit and two grown men at the helm station, she runs flat, as one would expect her to. But somewhere around 9½ knots, she lifts her bow slightly and reassuringly. A few knots faster than that, and she’s on full plane. At wide-open throttle, she makes an even 20 knots at 3,400 rpm. She remains remarkably quiet and vibration-free at this speed, thanks to an Aquadrive thrust bearing and soft engine mounts.

Brainerd recalls that he thought that the steering bar would be the first thing to go once the boat was commissioned, but everyone who uses it for a few minutes falls in love with it, he said. I did. It allowed for much more ergonomic, and precise, control than a conventional wheel. It also allowed for a tall, out-opening locker door for the compartment forward of the helm: a steering wheel would have limited the height of this door and created a more awkward grip when maneuvering. The bar makes 4½ turns, lock to lock.

Brainerd praised Smith for finding the right compromise between speed and weight. With no passengers aboard, the boat will typically be going fast. There will be comparatively more weight in the bow then, keeping the bow down, for optimal planing. With a load of passengers, she’ll typically travel more slowly—and the passenger weight will optimize the trim for that speed.

At this writing in late April, the new launch was being packed for shipment to the West Coast—along with a load of custom deck furniture that the Artisan Boatworks joinery crew had been building for the past several months. There, she would join her newly refit mothership, looking for all the world like a stylish Herreshoff launch. But she will offer the comfort, convenience, and speed described above, along with LED rope lighting around the cockpit’s perimeter and a well-concealed USB charging station for cell phones and devices. This is stuff that could only have been dreamed of in the 1930s, all packed into the soul of a Herreshoff launch. Spirit of Tradition, indeed. 🚤

*Matthew P. Murphy is editor of WoodenBoat.*



COURTESY OF ARTISAN BOATWORKS

**Goodbye Maine. After months of design, construction, fitting out, and testing, T/T MARIE was loaded for shipment to San Diego, where she joined her mothership at the end of April.**