

# Swan 36 Sloop

by Steve Knauth



Sometimes you have to get out of boating for a while, though in your heart you know you'll be back someday. That's how it was for Jim Lawlor.

"The attraction of boats is hard to describe," says the 70-year-old retired Connecticut judge. "It's not just the experience of being on the water; it's the adventure of it all."

Lawlor had owned a Swan 36, the popular European-built racer/cruiser designed at the time by Sparkman & Stephens, and sold it in the early 1990s after a decade of use. "The kids were young and had their interests," he says. "But I resolved that I would get back into boats again, and when I did it would be in a Swan 36."

That time turned out to be the late '90s. Lawlor found just the boat he was looking for — a vintage 1969 Swan 36 — in Racine, Wis., not far from the Palmer Johnson yard in Sturgeon Bay where she had been fitted out almost 30 years before. "Swansong had been imported from Finland [to Wisconsin], and she was known as a PJ36 at the time," Lawlor says. (Eventually, the Swans became known as Nautor's Swans, for their Finnish builder Oy Nautor AB.)

The boat had been actively sailed and raced on Lake Michigan, finishing as high as second in the iconic Chicago-Mackinac race. Though it was still in sailing shape, time had taken a toll on the well-used boat. Lawlor could see that Swansong was going to need some work, but that was part of the appeal. "She wasn't in disrepair and could have been sailed for many years with careful annual attention," Lawlor says. "But I wanted to restore her, and where possible, I wanted to do it myself."

The final price for the 30-year-old PJ36 was \$50,000. "I shipped her to Connecticut, where I sailed her summers and restored her in the winter," Lawlor says.

That's a bit of an understatement. The first project was to repair damage to her stem from being dropped at a boatyard. "She fell bow-first, striking the stem on the concrete, and rolled to port," Lawlor says. She was restored to "new condition" at Brewer Pilots Point in Westbrook, Conn. It wasn't the first big hit the old vessel had taken, either. "She is a remarkably sturdy boat," Lawlor says. "She had sustained serious damage earlier when she washed onto a breakwater in a Chicago storm. Despite these experiences, she shows no scars."

In the years that followed, Lawlor rewired the boat and replaced the original auxiliary engine with a 19-hp Yanmar diesel, upgrading the exhaust system at the same time. Then came a new holding tank and water system. The interior wood veneers on the cabin bulkheads were refinished, along with all of the other interior trim and the brightwork on deck. He also redid the fabrics and cushions throughout. "The work that demanded skills beyond mine was done by Pilots Point," Lawlor says. "At this time she is fully reconditioned and requires only annual maintenance."

Jim Lawlor



Lawlor calls Swansong a “sportboat” and admits she does not have all of the comforts usually found in a racing/cruising 36-footer, but that’s the way he likes it. “She is long and narrow, and the fore and aft overhangs do not offer living space,” he says. “She had some luxuries for cooking [along with] a shower and hot water, but I removed them, as I prefer to eat canned goods or eat out.”

Most important, Swansong is a pleasure to sail in all kinds of conditions. With a tiller rather than a wheel, she “steers like a dinghy,” Lawlor says. And she’s as rugged as the skipper, perhaps more so. “In bad weather there is no place I’d rather be. She’s very solid, and I have sailed her in up to 35 knots. She tracks well in a following sea, and she’s firm upwind.

She’ll take more than the crew.”

She also competes well on the local race circuit. “In recent years I’ve gotten back into racing, with mixed results,” Lawlor says. (Crewmember Steve Bergin points out that the “mixed results” included two trophies in last year’s Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge in Newport, R.I.)

Win or lose, the excitement is always there. “Competition increases the frequency of the challenge,” says Lawlor. “It permits us to test our skills and level of preparedness in controlled circumstances.” Most enjoyable are the vintage-boat regattas. The 44-year-old fiberglass Swansong qualifies as a “classic” because her design is pre-1970. All in all, she fills the multiple roles demanded of her owner, whether it’s racing, cruising or just sailing for the afternoon. “She is the perfect boat for day trips — easy to rig, easy to sail and offering enough comfort to meet any need,” Lawlor says. “We travel east to Cape Cod, Nantucket and north of Boston, and she’s big enough to handle the longer trips, as well.”

The evidence having been examined, the judgment is in: As far as the judge is concerned, she is the “perfect boat for serious sailing.”

“She offers the dignity and grace of many of the S&S designs of the era, along with the style of the Concordias and Hinckleys that are so highly regarded,” Lawlor says. “Anyone who appreciates these boats will enjoy the Swan 36.”

## WALKTHROUGH

Sparkman & Stephens was deep into America’s Cup design in the late 1960s when the original Swan 36 was being conceived, so it’s not surprising that they gave the boat a full keel and a separate rudder, the underbody concept they were using on their America’s Cup winner Intrepid. The hull shows moderate overhangs and a sweeping sheer, with the raised trunk cabin and aft cockpit popular at the time. (The characteristic Swan bridge-deck layouts would come later.) The masthead rig is simple, with a single headstay, and the boat has tiller steering.

Below, the layout, which sleeps five to six, is spartan by today’s standards, with a V-berth forward. The head compartment is just aft, equipped with a sink and an integral shower. The midships saloon has a C-shaped bench seat to port and a smaller one to starboard. Between them is a conventional drop-leaf table. Moving aft to the foot of the companionway, the starboard-side galley is laid out with a sink and a stovetop with room for an icebox or an under-counter refrigerator. A quarter berth is set to port.

## BACKGROUND

In 1966, Finnish builder Pekka Koskenkyla delivered a 36-foot Sparkman & Stephens-designed racing sloop to English sailor David Johnson, who promptly went out and began winning trophies. The rugged yet graceful sloop's racing success attracted the attention of other yachtsmen, who ordered the revolutionary fiberglass boat. The S&S design became the Swan 36, and the legend of Nautor's Swan was born. Oy Nautor AB built 90 of the boats during the next four years before the 36 was replaced by a larger updated boat, the Swan 37. A second Swan 36 debuted in 1988, designed by German Frers and Andrew Winch.

## SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 36 feet

LWL: 25 feet

BEAM: 9 feet, 8 inches

DRAFT: 6 feet, 1 inch

WEIGHT: 15,000 pounds

HULL: full keel/spade rudder

AUXILIARY POWER: single 15-hp diesel

TANKAGE: 13 gallons fuel, 45 gallons water

SAIL AREA: 238 square feet (main), 294 square feet (genoa)