

SWAN upmanship

How an off-the-shelf Sparkman and Stephens design became a major Finnish yachting marque. By *Barry Pickthall*



Tarantella, the original Swan 36, was fully restored to mark the Finnish company Nautor's 40th anniversary



Sparkman & Stephens designers Rod and Olin Stephens had a reputation for interviewing prospective owners to check out their suitability... before even agreeing to put pencil to paper. So when Pekka Koskenkylä rolled up at their Fifth Avenue design office in New York back in 1965, the Finnish yachtsman had quite a selling job to do.

Pekka's proposition was to harness the mass-production capabilities that the new-fangled glassfibre moulding process had to offer, to launch a series-produced 10m (c33ft) yacht designed for both cruising and racing back in Finland.

What experience did Mr Koskenkylä have in fibreglass production?

Pekka's hometown of Jakobstad was very close to the Arctic Circle. Was this an economic place to mould glassfibre boats?

Was there much of a market for sailing yachts in a country that is covered in ice for half the year? Did Mr Koskenkylä have any sailing experience?

Pekka had an answer to every question, but the two Stephens brothers remained sceptical. They only agreed to licence the design once Koskenkylä had three orders in his hand. Nor did they do too much work. They simply pulled out a stock 36ft (11m)

design (*Hestia*) from the bottom of the drawer, being built in the US – in wood and redrew the keel. But the design was one of the first with a fin keel and separate spade rudder similar to Olin's 12-Metre America's Cup success *Intrepid*.

Happy with this, Koskenkylä returned home with a set of plans under his arm and went to visit Heinz Ramm-Schmidt, the keenest offshore sailor in the region. "It's a winner," he proclaimed. But when Koskenkylä offered to build it for him, Heinz was less enthusiastic. "If I was going to buy a boat, it would be a half-tonner, and this one is a one-tonner."



**Cecille: 1971 Swan 36
recently restored**



**Early example of fin
keel and spade
rudder design**

“Well, what if I build you a one-tonner for the price of a half-tonner?” Pekka proposed. Ramm-Schmidt was not easily sold until returning home just before Christmas to find Pekka in his kitchen selling the concept to his family! He signed the contract, and only then did Koskenkylä admit that this meant three orders for him. Two other customers had agreed to buy the yacht, but only if Ramm-Schmidt did so too!

More significantly, it meant the birth of Nautor’s Swan.

The first Swan was launched in July 1966, just two months behind schedule. There had been teething problems during

construction. The concrete keel mould disintegrated when they came to pour the lead, spilling 3.6 tons of molten metal.

Also, Palmer Johnson, who were signed up to sell Nautor’s Swans in the US, had sent their own man to supervise the quality and strength of construction. Weighing 265lbs (120kg), he jumped on any part he thought looked suspicious and rejected every item that didn’t pass the test.

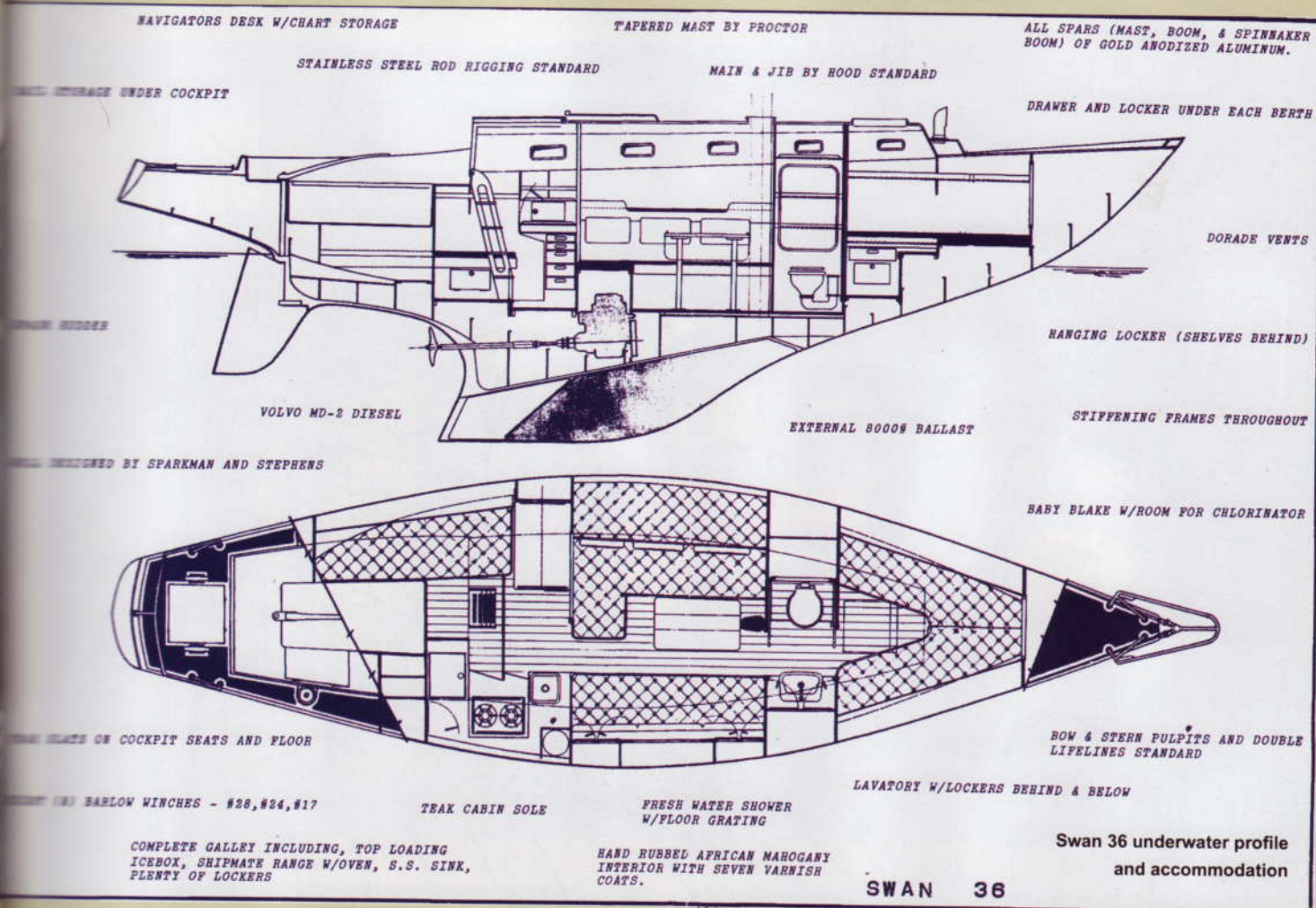
There were more delays en route from shed to water. The road proved too narrow and men from the yard had to cut down all

the trees on one side to allow *Tarantella*, as she was called, to pass. Then the chassis on the home-made trailer broke, pitching the new yacht into a ditch.

When finally launched, the Swan 36 proved an instant success. Rod Stephens came over for her first regatta and is remembered for spending most of the time at the top of *Tarantella*’s mast writing notes on a pad!

Another early customer was British yachtsman Dave Johnson who took delivery of his yacht *Casse Tete II* early in 1967 and

“He jumped on any part he thought looked suspicious”

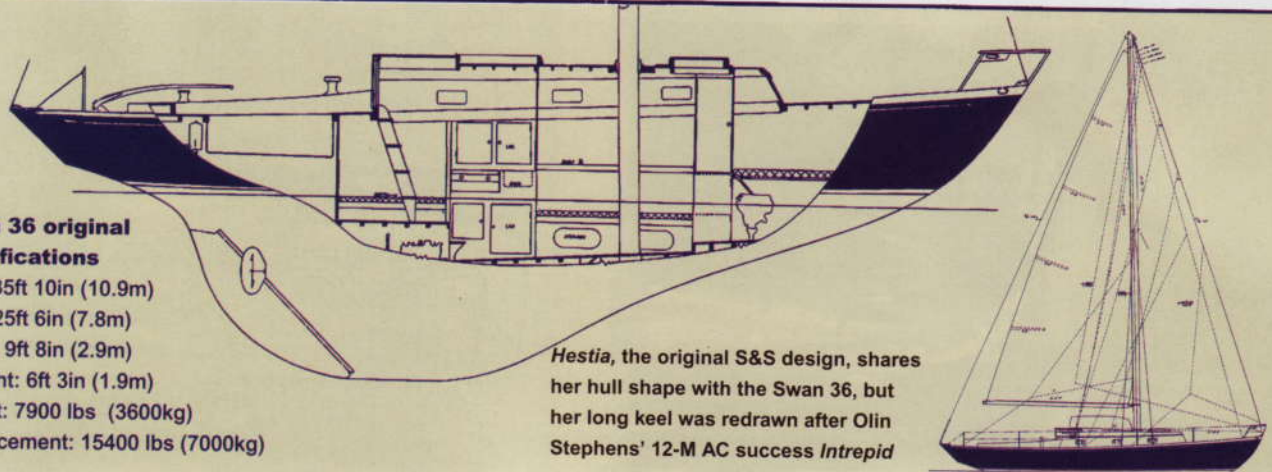


Swan 36 underwater profile and accommodation

SWAN 36

Swan 36 original specifications

- LOA: 35ft 10in (10.9m)
- LWL: 25ft 6in (7.8m)
- Beam: 9ft 8in (2.9m)
- Draught: 6ft 3in (1.9m)
- Ballast: 7900 lbs (3600kg)
- Displacement: 15400 lbs (7000kg)



Hestia, the original S&S design, shares her hull shape with the Swan 36, but her long keel was redrawn after Olin Stephens' 12-M AC success *Intrepid*

went on to score seven wins out of seven races during that year's Cowes Week regatta. Johnson became Nautor's UK agent, and the sales company he founded on the Hamble remains Nautor's top agent in the world.

A total of 86 Swan 36s were built between 1967 and 1970 but that design, based on the original long-keeled S&S 36 *Hestia*, was copied 143 times with 17 built by Benello in glassfibre and 40 more in wood by various builders.

S&S went on to produce a further 15 Nautor Swan designs, the largest being the 65, and the most famous being *Sayula II*,

owned by Mexican washing-machine magnate Ramon Carlin, which won the first Whitbread Round the World Race in 1973.

The Swan 36 is now a classic, and a favourite in the brokerage columns. Some have undergone full restorations, including *Tarantella*, which was bought back by Nautor to mark the Finnish company's 40th anniversary and totally refurbished. Lewmar replaced the winches and Volvo Penta restored her original 15hp 2-cylinder diesel engine.

The interior of this first Swan 36 remains dark and spartan, in contrast to later models like *Cecille*, built in 1971 for George Radley

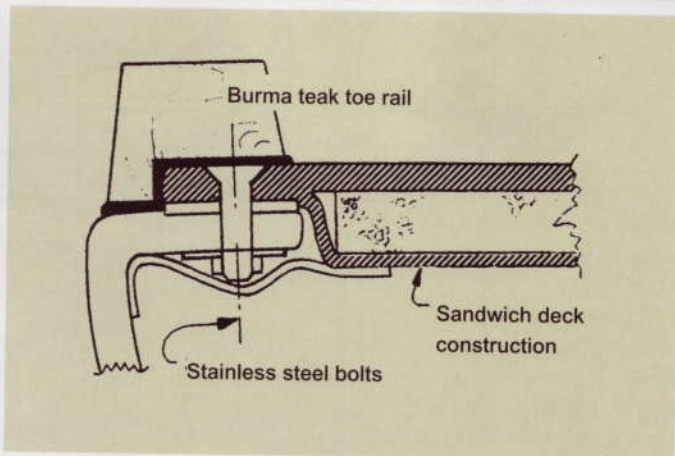
from Cork, Ireland, which utilised birch-faced plywood for joinery. George used *Cecille* for exactly what she was designed for – cruising and racing – until his death, when the boat fell into disrepair. She was bought in 2005 by Richard Hay and Peter Davis, who commissioned Desty's yard on the Hamble to complete a full restoration.

The single skin hull had suffered badly from osmosis and the balsa core in her decks had collapsed in several places.

Hay applauds the work carried out. "They ground back the hull below the waterline to remove all signs of osmosis, epoxy coated two new layers of mat and



Cecille's restored deck with, below, toerail detail and design drawing



re-gelled the hull. They also faired the topsides which were in a very bad state and finished with Awlgrip spray paint to a very high standard."

Desty's restored the decks by cutting out areas where the core had collapsed and remoulded exactly as before, right down to replicating her original 'Treadmaster' non-slip deck patterns. The walk-round areas have been laid with teak decking.

The original Volvo Penta MD2 engine had been replaced with a 2-cylinder Yanmar, which was found to be hanging on just one bolt and the prop shaft. "It was an appalling installation – disgraceful work,"

says Hay. "We had to rip it all out and start from scratch." *Cecille* is now equipped with a 3-cylinder Yanmar coupled to a new stern gear, which gives her the power to overcome the strong tides in the Solent.

Another modification was to the backstay. "This terminated on the pushpit which, when we stripped the boat, was only attached by two bolts. All the others had sheered!" Hay recalls. The backstay and its hydraulic adjuster is now attached to a chain-plate bolted to the transom.

She still has her original spars though. "We were keen to keep the same section which is no longer made, so stripped the spars right

down and replaced all the fittings," says Hay. *Cecille* is now berthed in Birdham Marina where Hay and Davis tend her with loving care. "We operate 'helicopter servicing' methodology which in practice means stripping everything down every 20 hours," says Richard.

This year, they intend to race her in a few RORC races in preparation for the Rolex Swan European regatta at Cowes (19-25 June) where it is hoped *Tarantella* will also compete.

Nautor's Swan UK sales: Tel: +44 (0)238 045 4880; www.nautorswan.com