

Bluewater cruising

More proper yacht

By Arthur Beiser

Minots Light is a 58-foot steel ketch with a teak deck and varnished mahogany cabin house, designed by John Alden and built by Abeking & Rasmussen in 1951. She has a long keel with attached rudder, her spars are spruce, and her sails are red. When they see her for the first time, a surprising number of sailors recognize her (as I did) from their reveries of the proper long-range cruising yacht. In the 17 years I owned *Minots Light*, I sailed her about 50,000 miles, and when she was sold two years ago, part of my soul went with her. "Next you will sell your mother," said a Danish friend upon learning that I had let her go.

Quicksilver is a 48-foot fiberglass sloop designed by Sparkman & Stephens and built by Nautor in 1978 as a New York Yacht Club 48 (NYYC 48), a centerboard version of the Swan 47 with a modified interior. She has a fin-and-skeg underbody; the pinched ends, bulging middle, and nearly flush deck of an International Offshore Rule (IOR) racer; a towering (67 feet above the water) aluminum mast. I have equipped her with all sorts of nontraditional gear such as rod rigging, a hydraulic backstay adjuster, and no less than 15 self-tailing winches. Nobody has exclaimed "The proper cruiser!" upon encountering *Quicksilver*, yet after nearly 6,000 miles of cruising in her during the past two

summers, I think she comes closer than *Minots Light* does.

By virtue of improved design and more modern construction, *Quicksilver* has very nearly the same usable volume in her accommodation as *Minots Light*. On an average passage, she is faster than *Minots Light*, much faster when it comes to speed made good to windward under sail. Thanks to her clear deck and efficient equipment, she is markedly easier to sail than *Minots Light*, and her smaller size and more effective rudder make her easier to maneuver in harbor. Though *Minots Light* is definitely the more comfortable vessel in a seaway (or, rather, the less uncomfortable vessel) because of her size and weight, *Quicksilver* is as steady on the helm and her galley is better placed and arranged for use offshore. Maintaining *Quicksilver* involves a tiny fraction of the effort and cost needed to keep *Minots Light* at her best. And, transcending all these objective factors, there is a subjective one: *Quicksilver* is more fun to sail.

A comparison between the two boats is interesting because they have such similar provenances. Both were designed for racing under the rule then current (Cruising Club of America [CCA] for *Minots Light*, IOR for *Quicksilver*), both were strongly built, both have excellent accommodations, and nei-

ther was quite as successful a racer as her more narrowly focussed competitors. (Although *Quicksilver* has never raced, several of her sisters have.) Would they exhibit such good sailing performances if the discipline of racing had had no part in their conceptions? I doubt it. Although a pure cruising boat can certainly be faster than a comparable racer because rating rule distortions can be ignored, in real life the temptations to favor harbor amenities, to provide high speed under power, to have a shoal draft without the cost of a centerboard, and so forth are usually overwhelming. On the other hand, had racing considerations been paramount, it is equally clear that neither *Minots Light* nor *Quicksilver* would have made such outstanding cruisers.

Minots Light's draft of 7 feet 9 inches is not much for a boat her size. That draft does not help her go to windward, but it does keep her out of many desirable harbors and channels. *Quicksilver* draws about six feet with her board up, which allows her into many places I have long wanted to go, and nearly 10 feet with her board down, which helps make her a witch on the wind—she can tack through less than 70 degrees. If the helm is unbalanced on a reach, lowering the board part way is the answer, and raising the board entirely contributes to speed down-

**The ketch *Minots Light* is the traditional sailor's idea of a true "proper, long-range cruising yacht."
But my fiberglass sloop *Quicksilver* is more "proper" yet**



Under way, *Quicksilver* is a pleasure, and tied up (Göta Canal) she is a joy

wind. Of course, a centerboard inevitably means a penalty. In *Quicksilver's* case, the board is stainless steel an inch thick and houses in a stainless trunk entirely inside the lead ballast keel, so the penalty is not structural, but the installation was not cheap.

Minots Light's hull is steel, her external keel cast iron, a combination that has survived many a bump and grounding without damage. There is just no stronger way to build a boat. But steel is heavy, diminishing performance, and is subject to corrosion and galvanic action, so construction must be meticulous and maintenance never ending. All else equal, I much prefer aluminum, but *Quicksilver* as a one-off aluminum boat instead of as a series-built fiberglass one would have cost about 50 percent more—I know because I looked into the

possibility. Fortunately, Nautor's fiberglass work is impeccable, and three groundings in her first season only put a few minor dents in *Quicksilver's* external lead keel. (There need be no shame in going aground once in a while: if you don't, it is because you never take chances, and that is nothing to be proud of.) I would certainly never have a fiberglass boat of such substantial size with an encapsulated-ballast keel.

Since *Quicksilver's* exterior is all fiberglass and aluminum, there seemed to be no point in having a teak deck with the upkeep it requires. Instead I had her deck covered with a cork-neoprene composition that comes in sheets with a raised nonskid pattern. The result is good-looking, though not so handsome as teak is; but I am happy to have only the teak in the cockpit and the teak on the bridge

deck to take care of.

Minots Light was given a rig of moderate area in the first place, and her ending up heavier than planned did not help matters. As a result, she needs a fair amount of wind to get up and go. I feel strongly that a cruising boat should have a big rig so that she can sail in light weather without needing jibs of inordinate overlap or spinnakers. A boat that can't make good progress without half a gale or hard-to-handle sails is no good at all. Of course, a big rig should be accompanied by appropriate stability, which in turn means a lot of ballast (half *Quicksilver's* displacement is in her keel) and a strong lightweight hull—so a sloop with a tall mast is inevitably a more expensive proposition than an underrigged ketch. The standard NYYC 48 has plenty of sail area, but I opted for a taller

most because I knew how much extra tankage, batteries, and equipment I was going to have installed. One result is sparkling performance whatever the weather. Another result is that *Quicksilver* is more tender than *Minots Light*. Even when overcanvassed, *Minots Light* hardly ever heeled more than 20 degrees or so, whereas *Quicksilver* is not particularly reluctant to go 10 degrees farther than that when caught with too much sail up. So there is less latitude for sloth on *Quicksilver*, and there were times last year on the way from Ireland to Gibraltar when we missed *Minots Light's* more phlegmatic temperament.

Quicksilver's mainsail has an area of 501 square feet, large enough and with a low enough aspect ratio (3.1:1) to be really useful downwind. The two jibs have areas of 574 square feet (100-percent LP) and 874 square feet (140-percent LP); the smaller one can be reefed down to 376 square feet. Both jibs have clews above the level of the boom, so I can see under them; their sheet leads do not need changing when they are trimmed in or out; they are easy to tack or gybe; and they can be held out with a whisker pole on a run without twisting. A formidable list of virtues. I cannot understand why cruising boats ever carry deck-sweeping genoas.

In addition, there is a forestay-sail that sets on a removable stay and can be used together with either jib or, in heavy weather, by itself with reefed main or trysail. The trysail has its own track on the mast, as it should. A very nice sail we often use is a huge drifter-spinnaker that sets flying and needs no pole except when it is wing-and-wing downwind, when a pole is a help. I also have a triradial spinnaker about which I have mixed feelings. The spinnaker is meant for light weather and we have had a lot of fun with it, but it is hardly necessary and occupies stowage space that could be better employed. To make life easy, we set the spinnaker in a zippered nylon tube. Next year, in the hope that it will make life still easier, we will try the kind of tube that slides up and down like a sock.

I believe that any over-40-foot cruising boat should have an inner forestay so that a small headsail can be hanked on without changing jibs

Besides a normal pole for the spinnaker, I had Nautor build a light whisker pole whose length is adjustable, so it can be used with either jib or with the drifter-spinnaker. Using this pole—indeed, doing everything on the boat except playing spinnaker—is a one-person job.

Although *Quicksilver* is better as a sloop or cutter (which she can become in a moment) than as a ketch, she is just about at the size limit for such a rig if a man and a woman are to be able to manage by themselves. For cruising, a ketch rig is certainly correct for the larger *Minots Light*, and my wife Germaine and I sailed her alone on many occasions. One of the traditional virtues of a ketch is that one seldom needs to reef: when the wind begins to whistle, we take down the mizzen, and when the wind picks up still farther, we drop the main and raise the mizzen. In fact, in all the miles I sailed *Minots Light*, we only reefed twice, but we must have sailed without the main or the mizzen scores of times. But modern slab reefing involves hardly more work than dropping and furling an entire sail. We reefed quite a few times in the past two years, and it was always fairly painless. I do not feel, on the basis of my experience with both rigs, that either has pronounced advantages in heavy weather provided the sloop is not too big. Since the sloop is distinctly better in light airs, it is the superior rig up to the maximum size of sails that can be handled by the minimum crew that will sail the boat.

What I do feel strongly is that an inner forestay is indispensable in any cruising boat over, say, 40 feet overall, since it enables a small headsail to be hanked on in advance and set without having to go

through the mess of changing jibs under bad conditions. The lower end of such a stay can be set up with a lever, so it can be detached and secured out of the way when it is not in use. Given no other options, I would take a forestay over a mizzen every time.

Why not roller furling for the jib? Having tried roller-furling jibs on two other boats, I am certainly not opposed to them on principle. The main reason for not having roller furling on *Quicksilver* is the lack of flexibility it entails. Such a jib can only be rolled up a limited amount without diminishing its performance, and changing a roller jib for another is a harder job than changing a hanked-on jib because it emerges loose on deck from the grooved headstay extrusion.

When Germaine and I are by ourselves, or when we have an equally lazy crew, we seldom change jibs when we are under way. If we have the big jib up and the wind rises a bit too much, we reef the main. If the increase in the wind is too much for this, or worse weather is in prospect, we furl the jib and set the forestaysail. The balance is not too bad with forestaysail and full main, though there is a wind interval in which boat speed suffers. If we have the small jib up and the wind falls somewhat, we can set the forestaysail as a supplement. If the wind really drops, we set the drifter-spinnaker and take down the jib. On the wind these expedients are only moderately effective, but *Quicksilver* has so slippery a hull that we manage well enough.

Both *Minots Light* and *Quicksilver* have aft cockpits and after cabins. In thinking about a new boat, I liked the idea of a center cockpit for a number of reasons: it would permit a separate engine room; communication between the helm and the chart table would be easy; and a large folding spray hood could shield the cockpit. But a one-off vessel proved too expensive, and none of the production center-cockpit boats I saw impressed me, so I accepted the NYYC 48 arrangement with some reluctance. Now I am glad I did so. With a center cockpit, two people would find it much harder to tie

up in harbors, especially in the Mediterranean where we often sail, and Germaine and I like to be able to cruise by ourselves. For us, self-sufficiency takes precedence over the other considerations. Another merit of an aft cockpit in a boat of this size is that the main cabin can be a few feet farther aft, closer to the widest part of the hull, which means a larger main cabin and not having the mast right in the middle of the table.

Quicksilver's accommodation is conventional, as the plans show, and works very well in practice. The berths in the forward cabin are real ones with mattresses, not pipe cots, and hinge up to give access to large bins for sails and the rubber dinghy. The pilot berths in the main cabin are adequate in width, which is not always the case; the transoms swing out for sleeping; and one of the berths in the after cabin is a double. The after cabin has its own companionway and head compartment. The galley is splendid in every way. The incomparable joinerwork makes the main cabin a pleasant place despite the absence of a view of the outside world when seated, which would have been a pleasure to have. More than once we missed *Minots Light's* deckhouse, which is separate from her main cabin, but except for that, *Quicksilver's* interior is better.

No less than 147 extras and modifications were specified for *Quicksilver*, which did not endear me to the builders, and quite a bit of additional gear has found its way onboard since. One's stance toward stone-age versus modern cruising depends, I suppose, partly on experience and partly on temperament. Keep it simple. Avoid gadgets. Don't have an engine. Electricity doesn't belong on a boat. Electronics never work. The hard way is the right way. Nothing invented after 1850 is any good. So say an astonishing number of books and articles on cruising under sail. I can only conclude that their authors have never sailed on a properly built modern yacht and/or are complete masochists. If money is their problem, they should say so: but they never do.

Those who attack aids to com-



Minots Light is the sort of yacht that makes every cruising sailor's heart beat faster

Norman Fortier

fort and safety always cite unreliability as though it were an axiom. Sure, something chosen because it is small and cheap, then poorly installed, and finally deprived of the love and care it needs cannot be trusted when the crunch comes. But an honest piece of equipment, properly located, mounted, and connected, and then treated with affection and respect is quite a different story. In the 17 years I owned *Minots Light*, her GM 3-71 diesel engine never failed to start when the button was pushed and never stopped unless told to. That engine is now 27 years old and still going strong. The freezer and refrigerator, gas stove and water heater, central hot-air heating, electric windlass, automatic pilot, and full electronics including radar all delivered the goods 99.9 percent of the time. I wish I were that reliable. Of course, malfunctions occurred once in a while and were certainly a nuisance, but they never crippled the ship. We did a lot of cruising on *Minots Light* every year, usually shorthanded by conventional standards for such a vessel, and we always ate well, stayed warm in cold weather, had a good idea of where we were, were able to communicate with the shore whenever we wanted to, and never had to pull up the anchor by hand.

Quicksilver has everything that *Minots Light* had and more besides, including a windvane self-

steerer to supplement the compass-controlled automatic pilot (on *Minots Light*, the boomkin for the mizzen backstay precluded a vane gear). These devices are absolute blessings, and do their jobs without eating, sleeping, or arguing with the skipper. Although small for the boat's size, her windvane steered *Quicksilver* reasonably well all the way from Ireland to just before Lisbon, when its rudder broke off because of fatigue. Since one of the virtues of this windvane is that it has its own rudder, thus providing a reserve in case of damage to the main rudder, this event was disturbing as well as being a nuisance. The failure was due to a manufacturing defect, and the replacement is supposed to be more durable. The automatic pilot always worked perfectly.

Actually, *Quicksilver* does lack one important item that *Minots Light* had: radar. On a sloop, the best place for a radar scanner is on a pillar on the stern. Alas, *Quicksilver's* handsome but inconvenient backward-sloping transom leaves no place for such a support that would neither spoil her appearance nor be in the way, so I did not have one installed when she was built. This omission was a mistake, as we learned when we were dogged by fog not only in Norway, the Shetland and Orkney Islands, Scotland, and Ireland, but also along the Atlantic coast of

Spain. It will not be long before a radar scanner sprouts from *Quicksilver's* deck somewhere.

Minots Light has a solid two-bladed propeller in an aperture, a compromise between efficiency under power and under sail. *Quicksilver* sports a three-bladed feathering propeller whose blades automatically orient themselves fore and aft when the boat is under sail. Efficiency is thus maximized under both power and sail. Despite her being a good deal heavier, *Quicksilver* goes a lot farther per gallon of fuel than her sisterships with folding propellers do, and has a higher top speed with the same engine. In reverse, the blades are supposed to rotate through 180 degrees so that the prop will develop as much thrust as in forward, which is not true of other propellers. But in her first year, sometimes *Quicksilver's* propeller blades did not turn through quite the full 180 degrees, and then the effect is to push the boat forward even though the shaft is turning the other way. The remedy is to shift all the way back into forward, not just neutral, and then directly into reverse again. This situation made maneuvering in a tight spot a close relative of Russian roulette, especially in the 64 locks of Sweden's Göta Canal, though in time I nearly got used to it. (Ha! You see? Machinery is no good! Gaff rig with flax sails is the only proper way to go to sea!)

This malfunction came as no surprise to the propeller manufacturer, who blamed faulty installation. In fact, the problem was too-thick grease in the propeller gear case, and replacing it with much lighter grease seems to have largely solved the problem. I am glad the propeller now works properly most of the time. I would be very reluctant to get a folding propeller, which is no more sure in reverse and less effective in forward, and to have a solid prop with a fin-and-skeg underbody means sailing with brakes on. A controllable-pitch propeller is best of all, of course, but the space between *Quicksilver's* gearbox and stuffing box is too short to install the required mechanism.

The standard NYYC 48 has tanks for 131 US gallons of water

and 55 gallons of fuel. Neither is enough for the kind of independence from the shore that is one of the delights of cruising, indeed fundamental to it. Also, the normal service batteries, a 12-volt set rated at 285 Ah, meant that daily charging would be necessary to keep the refrigeration compressor happy, which I do not consider acceptable. So, before deciding for sure on a NYYC 48, I flew up to Finland and went over one of the early boats with a tape measure to see what could be done. It proved possible to squeeze in three additional tanks totalling 99 gallons and to double the battery capacity (they are connected to give 24 volts, which I prefer), all without losing significant stowage space.

On the basis of our experience with *Minots Light*, which carries 235 gallons of water and 210 gallons of fuel, I decided to divide *Quicksilver's* tankage into 159 gal-

One's stance toward modern vs stone-age cruising depends on experience and on temperament. I like well-built new gear

lons for water and 126 gallons for fuel. I wanted a lot of fuel for a number of reasons: in general, it is easier to economize on water than on fuel; on a coastwise cruise, water is easier to find than fuel; at sea I find no virtue in drifting during a prolonged calm; and if I was wrong, the bilge has room for a rubber water tank to supplement the fixed stainless ones for a long voyage.

Thus far the tankage has worked out very well. At our usual speed under power of seven knots, the range is about 800 miles in calm water, and backing off the throttle a bit increases the range to over 1,000 miles.

An often-cited advantage of a large boat is her ability to carry a rigid dinghy on deck without its being in the way, and, in fact, for the first eight years I owned *Minots Light* we carried a nine-foot molded-plywood sailing dinghy upright in chocks. We then

switched to a 10-foot inflatable that not only uncluttered the deck but also meant that getting the dinghy in and out of the water became a cinch and that we could carry six people at a time as opposed to four. We ended up with two of these dinghies to enable the children to go off by themselves without leaving us marooned. For *Quicksilver* we also have an inflatable, but this is a slightly longer type whose larger buoyancy tubes mean drier trouser seats. Because of its particular shape, this dinghy fits neatly on the forward deck without interfering with sailing or anchoring, though on longer passages we always carry it deflated in a sail locker.

We picked up *Quicksilver* in Pietarsaari, in the Gulf of Bothnia, where she was built. It had been a hard winter, and when we left in late May, 1978, we had to dodge ice floes the first day. After a month and a half in Finnish waters visiting old friends, exploring new channels, and delighting in *Quicksilver's* performance, we went on to some weeks of cruising in Sweden and our sixth transit of the Göta Canal. Then down to Laesø, Anholt, Gilleleje, and Skovshoved in Denmark, and in October *Quicksilver* was hauled for winter storage in Copenhagen. In 1979 we again started in late May, and went north to revisit the Norwegian coast up nearly as far as Bergen. Then across to the Shetlands and Orkneys, fascinating islands that unfortunately were shrouded in fog during most of our visit there, and on to the west coast of Scotland and the east and south coasts of Ireland. Ireland was new to us, and a real delight. From Ireland we went offshore to northwest Spain and then Gibraltar, and finally to our Mediterranean base at Ile des Embiez off the French coast via the Balearic Islands. Even though she has many sisterships, *Quicksilver* always managed to attract a knot of admirers wherever she was tied up, and, to the pleasure of my daughters, they seemed to average a quarter of a century younger than those who used to gather to look covetously at *Minots Light*.





INTRODUCING THE SWAN 47 CENTERBOARDER - ALIAS THE NYYC 48*

For Nautor of Finland it is a singular honor that the New York Yacht Club chose a Swan for its new one-design class. Launching the design competition that led finally to the selection of the modified Swan 47, the Club outlined the following specification:

"While rating under the International Offshore Rule is certainly important, cruising comfort, interior design (including an owner's stateroom), two heads — at least one with a shower — hot and cold water, good refrigeration, a good galley, a good electrical installation and accommodations for eight are strong prerequisites..."

These words almost matched Nautor's brief when it had commissioned the Swan 47 design from Sparkman and Stephens. Comfort, aesthetic appeal and enduring quality have always been at the forefront of

Nautor thinking. Thus, Swans have not only performed with distinction in gruelling world-girdling races but they have maintained a high investment value.

"The sail plan should be simple and one should be able to handle the sails and the boat with just a husband-wife team..."

To meet the NYYC's special requirements, a longer, shallower keel housing an inch-thick stainless steel centreplate replaces the 47's fin. (Draught board up: 5.9 ft., board down: 9.5 ft.) And Nautor has accented the cruising aspect: bigger fore cabin, a larger forward head, and galley facilities to handle the most exacting cuisine.

"The result", says one of her first, very experienced, owners, "makes the NYYC 48 quite possibly the best production boat of this size for cruising when good performance under sail is required."

Specifications:

Length overall	47.80'
Waterline	36.24'
Beam	13.76'
Draught board up	5.9'
Draught board down	9.5'
Displacement (IOR)	34400 lbs
Ballast	17500 lbs
Engine	Volvo Penta 45 kW (61 HP) diesel

X) In fact, she's 47.8 ft. overall.

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