

Swan 41, a fascinating mix of beauty and efficiency

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(by Christian Février, translation by Lars Strom and Philippe Vidal)

Twenty times during the January Boatshow the Voiles et Voiliers crew did visit, caressing the sides of this superb racer, analyzing every detail of the deck equipment, and admiring the outstanding woodwork in the interior.

Swan... magical word... Nautor is rightly considered the number one boatbuilder in the world for series production.



All the grace and power of the Swans, trade mark for the famous Nautor serie, is displayed in these photos. Blending skillfully the cockpit coaming with the deck camber, Olin and Rod Stephens have found a remarkable solution in the development of the coachroof shape.

(Note: It needs to be pointed out here that the Swan wedge deck shape was developed by Nautor, and the first model having this feature was the Swan 48, then the Swan 65 and 44 had it before the 41).

The sliding foredeck hatch gives direct access to the sail stowage. Also note the three Dorade boxes for ventilation, with the addition of three cowls and two Tannoy vents this ensures an excellent ventilation of the interior. The Swan designers always paid considerable attention to this function.

On the photo at the top the impressive bow wave action gives an indication of the high speeds achievable off the wind. For the (optional) teak deck it can be remarked that the cost is the same as for a small inshore cruiser. At this stage we are not going to discuss that at all!

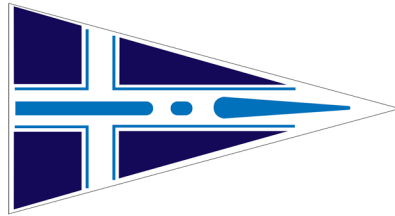
Having spent there four days in August I must admit that the British builder Camper & Nicholson is hard on the heels, and often equal. With a different style though.

It should be remembered that when Superstar of Hamble, the first Swan 44 (actually hull 003) for Dave Johnson arrived in England 1973, she was declared *Boat of the Show* in London that year (A Swan 44 was also awarded *Nastro d'Oro Eleganza Mare* in Genua the same year). One year later the Swan 41 would most probably have earned the same title in London, but the committee, obviously for diplomatic reasons, decided to award the nomination to the Nicholson 42, whose

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high quality of the interior deserved to be emphasized.

To realise the interest for the Swans in racing circles in those days let us remember the previous summer, when amongst the thirty-two contenders in the British selections for Admiral's Cup teams there were seven Swan 44's ! And close to us, in the Cowes-Dinard Race Swans took the top positions in three classes: *Izenah IV* (Swan 44/031) Mr Holley in Class I, *Olbia V* (Swan 41/013) Mr Archer in Class II, and *Intuition* (Swan 38/004) Mr Streeter in Class III. The Giraglia Race saw three Swan 48's amongst the first four, the first was a Nicholson 55. And let's also remember the Swan 65 *Sayula*, winner of the first Round the World Race.

This is why, when we travelled to La Trinite, where chantier Vanek, Nautor agent for the Channel and Atlantic coasts had sold the first two Swan 41's, we felt as children going to a theme park!

Cockpit: Although small it is highly functional. The helmsman is particularly cared for with a seat and a floor with angled foot rests. The starboard longitudinal seat opens completely for access to the life raft. Note the Tannoy vents for galley and head respectively, the teak handrails and the three-legged grabrails assisting the companionway user, the small dodger over the entrance providing protection in hard weather or rain, and the well shaped cleats properly located and sized.

Deck gear:

On the Swan 41 each fitting is perfect. We can select four examples. The first one is the clever integration of the mainsheet car adjustment blocks into the coaming. The two control lines are led to the helmsman. This is the most efficient and elegant system we are aware of. The right hand photo shows the toe rail aft end lug taking the spinnaker sheet block, with a right angle bar added as a fairlead. No sharp edges, it is neat, proper, and functional. The next photo shows the genoa sheet lead to the winches. The angle is perfect, there are no "twists" on the winches. The last photo shows the mast at deck level, with watertight collar, bails for taking the halyard shackles, deck blocks for leading the halyards to the winches on the coachroof. On the Swan there are not eight or ten control lines and 20 kg of line spaghetti in the cockpit. Even if this sounds old-fashioned the function is clear and avoids mistakes.

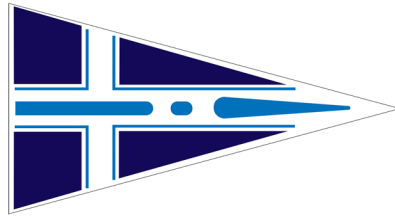
For this test we had to wait for the return of Pierre Lenormand from Kriter doing the Round the World Race, he met us there with Sylvie, our Miss Sail. The deck hands Quentin and Marc Berthier, the inseparable duo from Saint Malo, were also engaged.

After some time spent to get the mainsail, we set off in the late afternoon to get the first impressions. There was a light

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breeze. The different behavior compared to the 44 was immediately recognizable. Reacting to the lightest puff, with a very sensitive steering, and more manoeuvrable, she is generally much more lively. Like her bigger sister she is not particularly stiff up to a heeling angle of about 15 degrees, the waterline beam is modest. Evaluating the performance in light winds as well as in a breeze it is clear that the high freeboard and the ballast ratio 54% work together creating a dangerous competitor when closehauled. Compared to



The saloon: With two berths each side it is perfectly symmetrical. The folding table can take six persons, but this blocks the passage to the bow. The mast in the middle sometimes hides the face of the tablemates, but provides a very good support when moving around. Behind the seat backrests six deep stowage lockers. Note the stainless tie rod connecting the deck to the keel.

Navigation area:

Located to starboard of the entrance. The size of the bulkhead allows for an impressive array of electronics. Against the hull the electrical switchboard, here with a big radio transceiver. This area has fairly good lighting through the big entrance hatch. The saloon is less privileged.

The fo'c's'le:

Contains two equipment bins. The woodwork is as sophisticated as in the aft cabin. Note the perfect finish of the overhead, the integrated steps for climbing up on deck, and the two small light fixtures that turn on when their lid is opened. Between fo'c's'le and saloon two lockers along the side.

The galley:

Situated to port from the entrance it is outstandingly equipped - big refrigerator, cooker with three burners ENO, big stainless steel sink with hot and cold pressure water. Foot pump for sea water, very large stowage lockers along the topside. All the lockers have ventilation grills, also notable the protection bar in front of the cooker and the high fiddles around the horizontal surfaces. Despite a rather commonplace appearance this galley is extremely practical and well thought out.

The head:

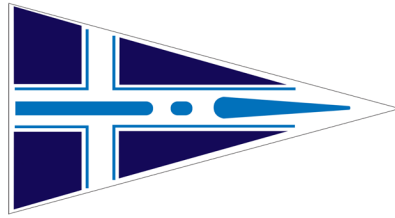
On starboard side with connection both to the saloon and to the aft cabin. Nothing is missing - cupboards, medicine chest, lockers, large inclined mirror, telephone type shower with sump tank. The WC is Baby Blake of Gosport, in spite of its impressive chromed hardware it is really much appreciated by all crews thanks to its efficiency and lack of problems.

The interior is completed with the aft cabin, a true private appartement with two berths and dressing table. The engine space is between the entrance and the aft cabin, with an integrated oilskin locker.

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the size of the cockpit the steering wheel is very wide. The steering is unbelievably sensitive. Few yachts allow luffing easily from 30 degrees apparent, degree after degree, towards the impossible limit... Swan 41 is such a yacht.

In smooth water we could maintain sufficient speed at 20 degrees apparent. The wind strength was about Force 2. For sure the speed drop compared to sailing at 35 degrees was significant. It is, however, important to know the limits of one's yacht. When racing these possibilities are of interest as they may allow passing the competition on the windward side.

The first tacks enabled us to appreciate the adequate location of each piece of deck equipment, their size, and their flawless function. The majority of the deck gear is manufactured by Nautor (including mast, boom, and poles!) and is of very high quality. For the remaining equipment we recognized the names Palmer Johnson, and Lewmar. The hatches are, however, from Goiot and made in France.

When manouvering we soon became aware of the relatively small cockpit. The transom is fairly narrow, and the helmsman with its steering pedestal occupy about a third of the cockpit.

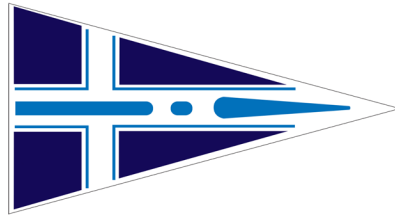
On each cockpit seat two persons can sit, not more. Therefore we chose to sit close to the companionway which is indeed a comfortable place, but could as well have been sitting on the windward side. Your back will find a little comfort on the sides of the coachroof which is rather uncommon nowadays.

The cockpit coamings are very wide. Extending aft from the coachroof they carry winches and cleats. Two big Lewmar 55 3-speed for the genoa. Two Lewmar 45 3-speed for the spinnaker. They really do the job... To work the genoa win-

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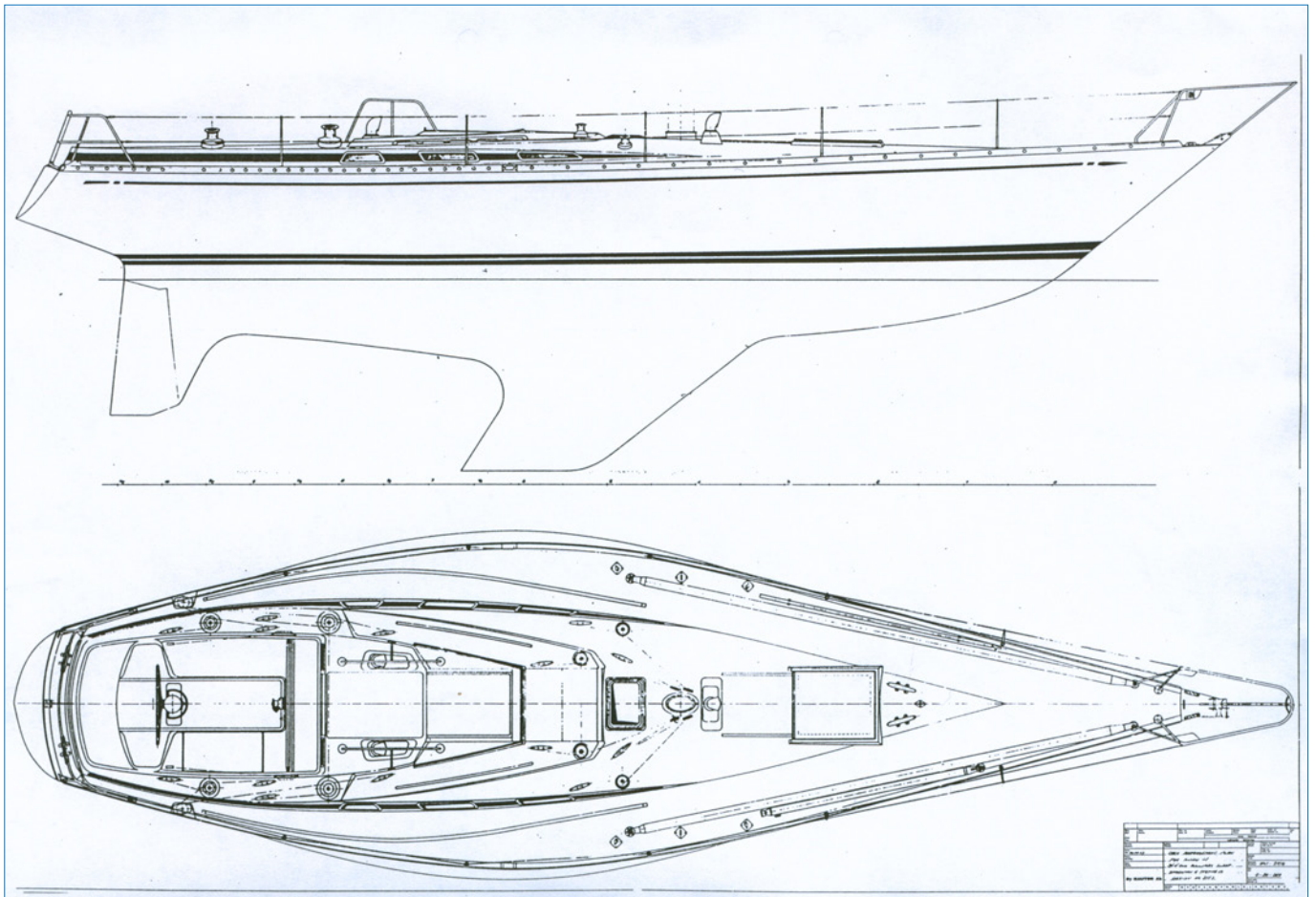
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ches from the cockpit is difficult. It is much easier to work them from the deck. For tacking on the wind it would be ideal to link the winches with shafting below deck.

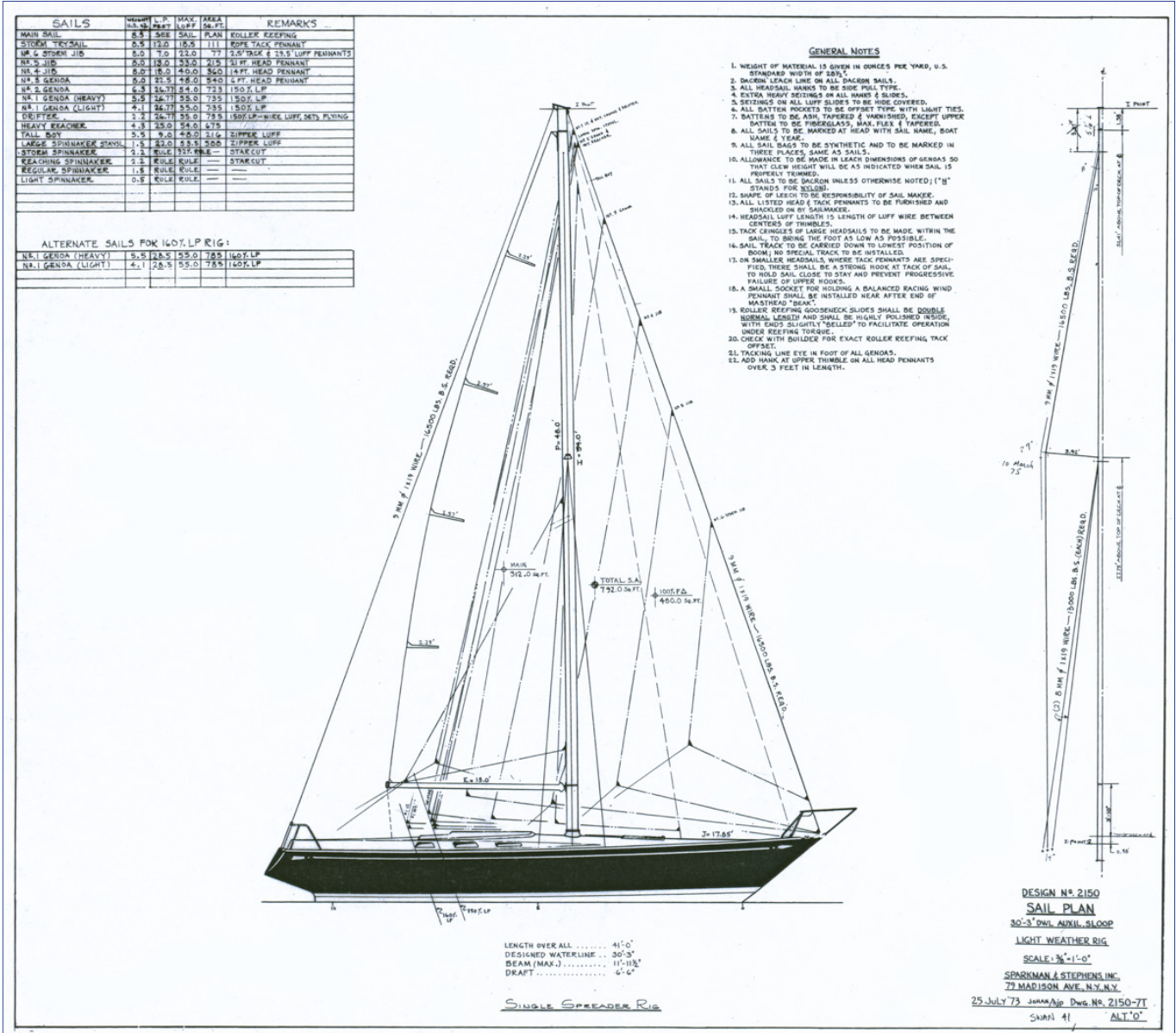
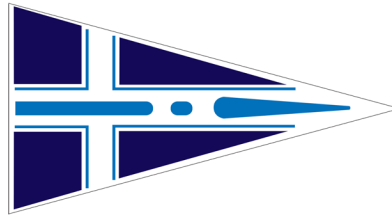
Due to the width of the coamings the backrest angles are not very comfortable at sea. Despite this inconvenience it is difficult not to be impressed by the attractive teak deck and the elegant solution with the fore deck wedge shape blen-



ding in near the mast area. The three arrow shaped side windows create a streamlined profile which is rather elegant.

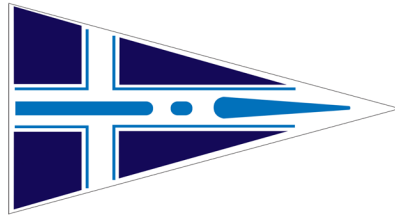
Moving around the deck is easy, as the companionway is flanked by two stainless tube handrails on deck, similar to the 44, and further there are teak handrails each side along the entrance ladder. The stanchions sit in strong bases welded to the perforated angle bar toe rails surrounding the entire deck.



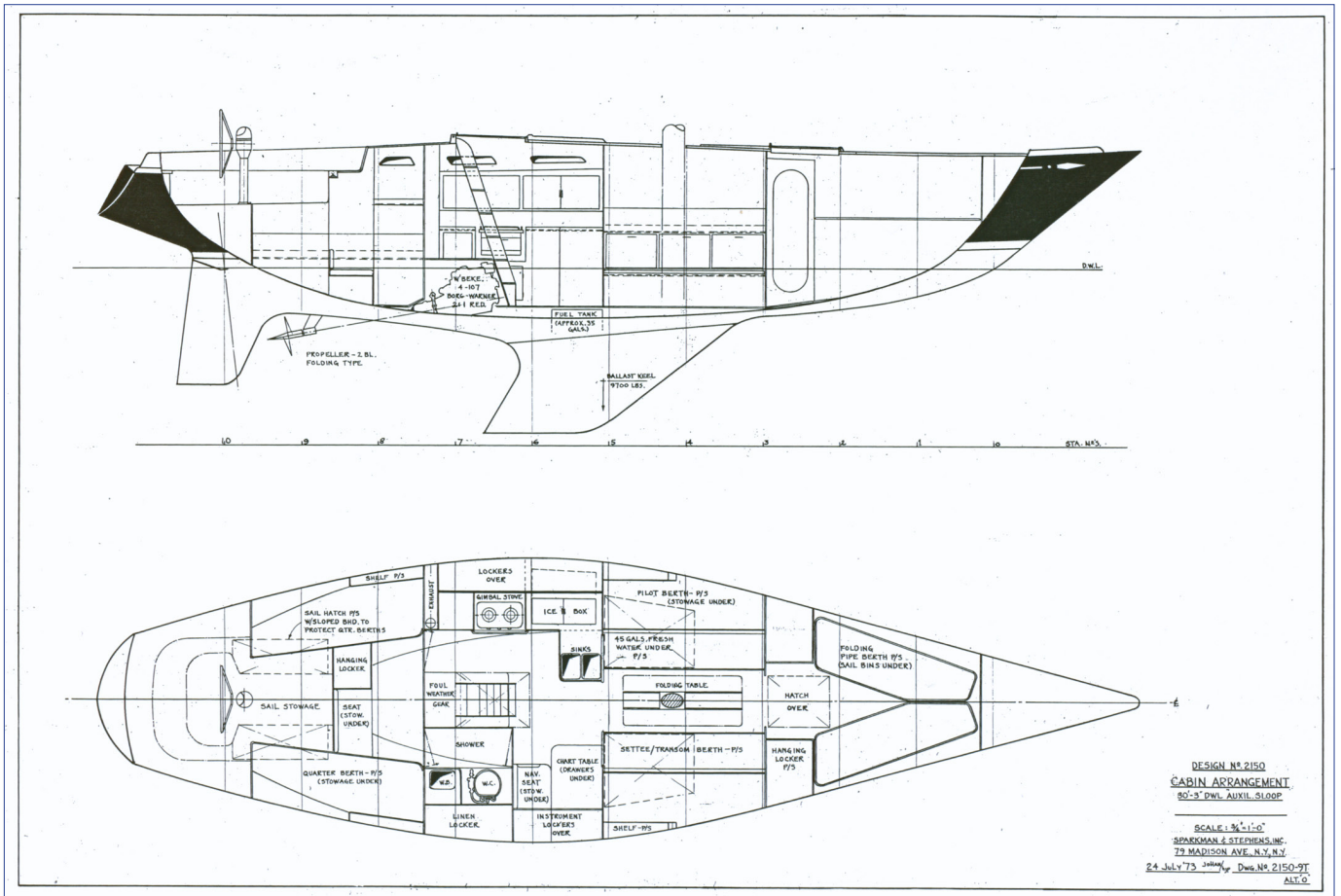


We left La Trinité the next day setting a course to Belle-Ile in a westerly breeze that slowly freshened during the whole day. Once more we go back to this incredible talent for beating very close to the wind and for making the best use of the squalls that descend from the heights of Belle-Ile. By chance a big ketch was already anchored in the outer harbour, and agreed to take our mooring line for the time we had a snack.

The exquisite interior woodwork would be well suited for a lunch in candle lighting. The Swan 41 interior is indeed



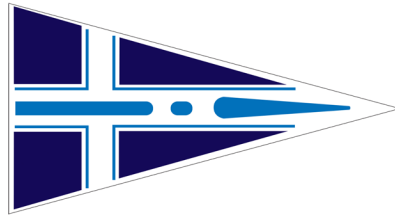
dark, very dark, and this is a pity. The yard suggests deck prisms as an option. For this price level natural lighting should be standard. This said, the quality of the interior is really fantastic. The well known German yacht builder Abeking & Rasmussen (*Gitana V*) does not do it better in their one-offs.



Now it blows a steady Force 6 and the squalls descend from the citadel. We return to the sea, are some time in the shelter of the island, running towards the Houat fairway, and the Soeurs passage. We spent three quarters of an hour only for the 7 miles to Beniguet. Watching from the pulpit the bow slicing through the water like a razor, makes for a really wonderful scene. No rising bow wave in front of the bow, it appears to glide through the water like a cargo ship in light condition.

We pass the narrow passage at full speed. On the rocks of Grand Coin, the cormorants dry their wings in the sun. We plunge off the wind to try the starcut. Under the pull of the excellent Banks, the speedometer needle climbs more and more: 10 knots, 10.5... The sea which is rather smooth in the bay, makes for ideal conditions. Looking at the narrow





bow one wonders if it is not going to dig in. But in these flat sea conditions Swan 41 behaves well, and lends itself to occasional overspeeding.

The waves collapse continuously in rollers each side of the transom. This is great powering, with a perfect steering control, which is really different from the Stephens of the 60s. Pierre, Marc, Quentin, and Sylvie all took a spell at the helm in order to assess and savour the stampede.

In larger seas and 30 to 35 knots of wind this would not be as easy. The rythmical rolling when overspeeding continuously is a problem for this type of hull, and it is better to limit the sending of crew to the foredeck to a minimum.

The wind strength continued to increase. We bridled the spinnaker to snatch blocks positioned far forward in order to stabilize it. Now and then a surf took us to 11.5 knots, sometimes 12. Some 5 to 8 knots more wind would be necessary for shooting off permanently.

Now we went beating back along the coast. The anemometer showed 30 knots. In the shallow areas with wind against tide the chop was very rough and short. The power of the 8 tons on the wind is impressive. With the main sheet car at the leeward end stop we sailed at 7 knots and 35 degrees apparent wind angle. We should have rolled in three to four turns to relief the load and gain a few more degrees of heading, but the entrance to the Gulf (of Morbihan) was close... The water reached the toerail. Probably the last 15 to 20 centimetres of freeboard should be dry for obtaining the best performance. The hull balance is absolutely perfect. Heeled to 35 degrees the steering remained light and accurate. The Swan 41 really communicates, and provides wonderful pleasure for the helmsman, just like a Dragon or 5.5mR would.

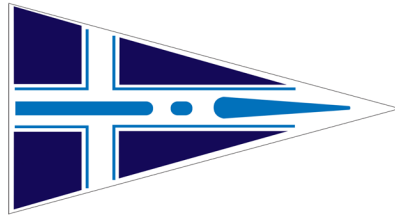


The Petit Mont now passes on the starboard side, sheets are eased. We now enter the Gulf of Morbihan, whose landscape though hundreds of times travelled, is always as fascinating towards the end of the day. Calm... silence... gurgle of the eddies along the hull, seagulls crying, a cormorant dives near the Menhir circle of Er Lanic... spots of saffron from the brooms on the Ile Longue and Gavrinis. The genoa is lowered to slow down and appreciate the scenery.

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At nightfall we anchored at Arradon. At the end of the dock a little ball is waiting. Expanded, the ball sends a signal: she is a nice looking little sailor who proceeds to take us ashore. The Commodore of the Société des Régates de Vannes, his charming spouse Monique, and their not less charming little sailor celebrating that evening the return of Pierre Lenormand from Cape Horn and the passage of the crew from Voiles through their waters. For the legendary reception we always received in your waters, a warm thank you Commodore!

Return late in the night to the yacht. Our punt is progressing slowly between numbers. Like at Ile Aux Moines, civilisation has arrived, and all ancient ground tackle belonging to locals, sometimes twenty years old have been taken away. Civilisation has installed plastic balls with numbers. And now one has to pay a fee. Lots of locals have left for closeby coves which are still preserved. But for how long !

The bright light of sunrise in the Gulf wakes us up. Sorry, but now we have to return the Swan to her owner, who arrives this evening. The film of the Gulf's scenery is winding back. Coming out, we pass inside Méaban. The alignment is Le Faucheur by Berder tower... Under mainsail alone, the Swan comes smoothly alongside the dock in La Trinité.

Referring to the quality of the construction, the efficiency of the deck arrangement, and the sailing performance of the Swan 41, it is difficult to give her another place than first among series built yachts in this size.

On these three points the Swan 41 owner will not be disappointed. The only reservation I want to make concerns the interior arrangement which I consider too classic, too symmetrical, and does not always function well. But this neutrality coupled to the perfect execution is perhaps one of the reasons for her success, she has to be ordered two years in advance, to all corners of the world.

Desirable Improvements

At this quality level it does not surprise the reader that the points brought up are very few. Referring to the general concept we already noted the small size of the cockpit, and the lack of a double berth. It appears difficult to modify these two points. Some others, however, could well be changed.

- *Genoa winches: On a broad reach, or off the wind the mainsheet fouls the leeward winch, and makes cranking difficult. Linking the two winches would allow working on the windward side without being disturbed by the mainsheet.*
 - *Light in the interior: Two prisms near the mast should be added as standard. For the time being the builder offers them only as an option!*
 - *Noise insulation of engine: insufficient*
 - *Navigation station: The seat is uncomfortable, particularly on starboard tack. A modified more dished shape would be preferable*
 - *ENO cooker (the same as on Brise 40) has the same problems: the burners are too close to the fiddle bar, and pots and pans can not be centered.*
 - *Lee cloths: Not long enough. When sleeping on the windward side, head and feet slide out through the openings. A proper cloth should have the same length as the berth.*
- 20 kg Danforth anchor: The holding power of this anchor is average. There are safer anchors available today for equipping a yacht in this price range.*

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