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Above: The offshore racers of yesteryear can convert to performance cruisers today
Opposite: Fitout was both stylish and bulletproof

Quality Finnish

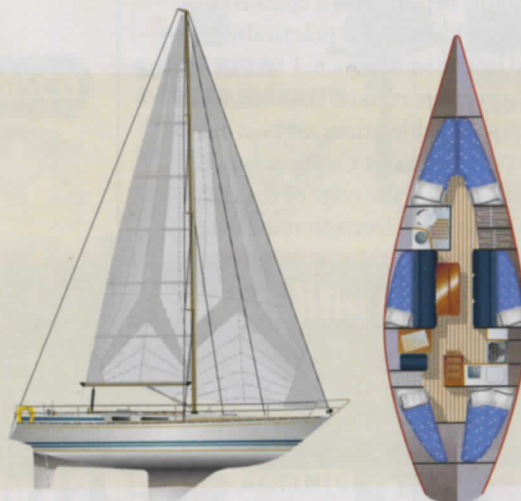
The Sparkman & Stephens-designed Swan 38 combines Scandinavian build quality and creditable performance, finds **Jake Frith**

Pietarsaari, on the Gulf of Bothnia, was and is, climate-wise, a less than perfect location for building yachts; the sea freezes for up to five months of the year as winter temperatures plummet to -30°C. But from the late 60s, with a rich tradition of local skilled boatbuilding craftsmen to draw on, this unlikely location went down in marine industry history as the birthplace of some legendary sailing boats.

The early Swans were innovative but what shone through most about this new marque was its obsession with quality, summed up by Pekka Koskenkyla, founder of Oy Nautor AB's motto, "The very best". While prices have always been high, for certain customers the yard's attention

THE SPEC

LOA: 38ft 3in (11.7m)
LWL: 28ft 8in (8.8m)
Beam: 11ft 6in (3.5m)
Draught: 6ft 6in (2m)
Ballast: 3,200kg (7,100lb)
Displacement: 8,500kg (18,300lb)
Windward sail area: 667sqft (62m ²)
Built: 1974-1979



to detail was just not available from other makers. For instance, then, as now, for every boat that is built, a sample of the woodwork is retained at the factory to allow perfect matching and repairs in years to come.

The most numerous design of them all was the Swan 38, produced between 1974 and 1979, of which 116 boats were produced. While Nautor's stayed loyal to the Sparkman & Stephens design house that had built all Swans so far, this time, brothers Rod and Olin Stephens penned an up-to-date look with its wedge coachroof blending seamlessly into the foredeck forward and the cockpit coaming aft.

Stepping aboard *Jacobite*, a 1977 Swan 38 currently up for sale with Ancasta in Lymington, I'm struck with the feeling of quality that she continues to exude down below. The craftsmanship on usually humble woodwork components such as the lockers' ventilation louvres and the cabin table takes the game beyond shipwright skills and up towards the realms more usually encountered in antique furniture. Despite the fact that the boat has clearly been well sailed, and has an enviable Solent race record to prove it, she was clearly built to a level where even wear and tear has taken on a desirable patina.

Critics have argued that the 38s lack both ventilation and light below, due to the flush deck design and narrow wedge windows, but I disagree with them. While it's clearly not going to compete on airiness with a modern deck saloon yacht, the

The designers

Sparkman & Stephens



In 1928 the junior Yacht Racing Association of Long Island Sound invited designs for a fleet of sail training yachts. The broker, Drake Sparkman asked the then 20 year old Olin Stephens (above), a keen

designer, if he wanted to put together a proposal. Olin accepted and so the best known partnership in US and arguably world yacht design was created in October 1929.

Stephens was reported to have said in 1928: "In any design, the most important factors of speed seem to be long sailing lines and large sail area, with moderate displacement and small wetted surface. Then comes

beauty, by which is meant clean, fair, pleasing lines. Though per se beauty is not a factor of speed, the easiest boats to look at seem the easiest to drive."

Fast forward to 1974 and Sparkman & Stephens' achingly beautiful design number 2167 for the Swan 38 makes it clear that this famous design house was still holding true to its original philosophy.

clever use of lighter than usual (for the time) woodwork and a light diffusing deck prism in the heads saves the day.

Her eight single berths are a sensible seagoing offering of saloon and outboard pilot berths in the main cabin, all of which boast lee cloths, twin pipe cots forward and a twin V-berth aft. They start at 6ft 2in (1.9m) long for the pilot berths ranging up to 7ft (2.1m) for the forward pipe cots.

On deck, the high bridgedeck and shallow washboard makes entry and exit of the cabin a somewhat strenuous up-and-over affair, and there is a marked lack of stowage on account of the aft cabin squeezed in beneath the cockpit. ✦

THE SURVEYOR

Nick Vass, Omega Yacht Services

Swans are powerful racers with beautiful interiors rather than cruising-focused yachts. Expect sailing to be demanding and exhilarating. They were well made and designed to take a pounding both on the racing circuit and while crossing oceans to get to the start line. Rig and equipment were over-specified and the stylish interiors were robust. However, yachts of this age will require a great deal of maintenance and will at some stage require a restoration as though they were a classic car. Boatyards will see you coming so don't buy one unless you have deep pockets.

► Contact: www.omega-yachtservices.co.uk

THE BROKER

Ross Farncombe, Sunbird Yachts

Any boat from the Sparkman & Stephens drawing board is bound to attract a certain caché. Many can be found through the S&S Swan Association (www.classicswan.org). Currently you will only find only one example available in the UK at an apparently very high specification and a commensurately high asking price of £119,995.

Here, the old adage of there being no such thing as a cheap boat is so very true. A good example will cost a pretty penny and a bad one, while cheap to buy, will certainly empty the bank account to put right.

► Contact: www.sunbirdyachts.eu

