

# Test of time



SWAN 65

## Sayula II

*An extraordinary history involving a knockdown and an attack by bees only goes to emphasise the rugged seaworthiness of this first Whitbread winner.*

*Larry Edwards reports en route to Mexico*

When Mexican yachtsman Ramon Carlin sailed his Swan 65 *Sayula II* to victory in the inaugural Whitbread Round the World Race in 1973, he promoted the as-yet unsung classic yacht to legendary status. The Sparkman & Stephens design, of which 42 were eventually built before production was discontinued in 1990, continued the growing Nautor reputation for performance sailing in dignified comfort.

Hull number three, *Sayula II* was launched in 1973 in time for a shakedown during Cowes Week before setting off on her 27,000-mile victory lap around the globe.

During the circumnavigation, the ketch proved the exceptional seaworthiness of Finland's still germinating line when the yacht survived, with minimal damage, a potentially fatal rollover in the notorious Roaring Forties. Sailing at 48°S midway between Cape Town and Sydney, *Sayula II* was laid on her beam ends by a freak wave. She is reckoned to have rolled 170° before righting herself.

One crewman suffered a painful leg injury, another a concussion; two more had broken ribs, and virtually everyone on board endured cuts, scrapes or bruises. The only structural damage to the yacht, however, was a broken lower mizzen shroud and burst freshwater storage tanks, although the binnacle and starboard compasses were lost, masthead lights mangled and the steering wheel buckled.

Twenty years later, green-hulled *Sayula II*

remains a proud bearer of the Swan 65 banner, a design that enjoys a worldwide reputation for its comfortable, seaworthy performance. We were lucky enough to be aboard her on a trip south from San Diego, California.

*Sayula II* is still rock solid. The inherent strength of her design and construction (at the time it was said you couldn't build a boat this big in glassfibre) was recently confirmed when she ran aground on Mexico's west coast after being engulfed by a swarm of bees.

### HISTORY

LIFE began for the Swan 65 in 1972, when Swan 55 owners Don and Kitty McMullen decided they wanted a bigger boat for long-distance cruising.

At the time, no other company had built a GRP boat this big for series production. She would be considered overbuilt by today's standards.

For that time the 65's standard specification was high and included luxuries such as a freezer. In terms of her layout, the bulkheads had to remain in the same place,

but otherwise owners had considerable flexibility.

Around hull number 13, the keel was replaced with a heavier version.

Most 65s were ketch-rigged. However, four sloops were built, most notably the Whitbread entrant, *King's Legend*.

In 1982 Nautor tried to pension off the 65 by introducing the more modern German Frers-designed 65-1. This had a bigger sloop rig and a more up to date underwater shape, with more volume forward and aft. She had a better all round performance

than the 65. While the 65 was built mainly in chopped strand mat, the 65-1 used more efficient woven and unidirectional fibres.

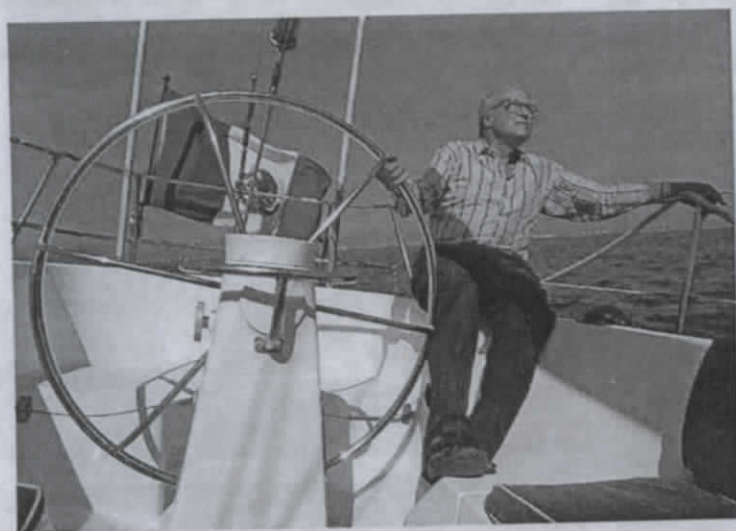
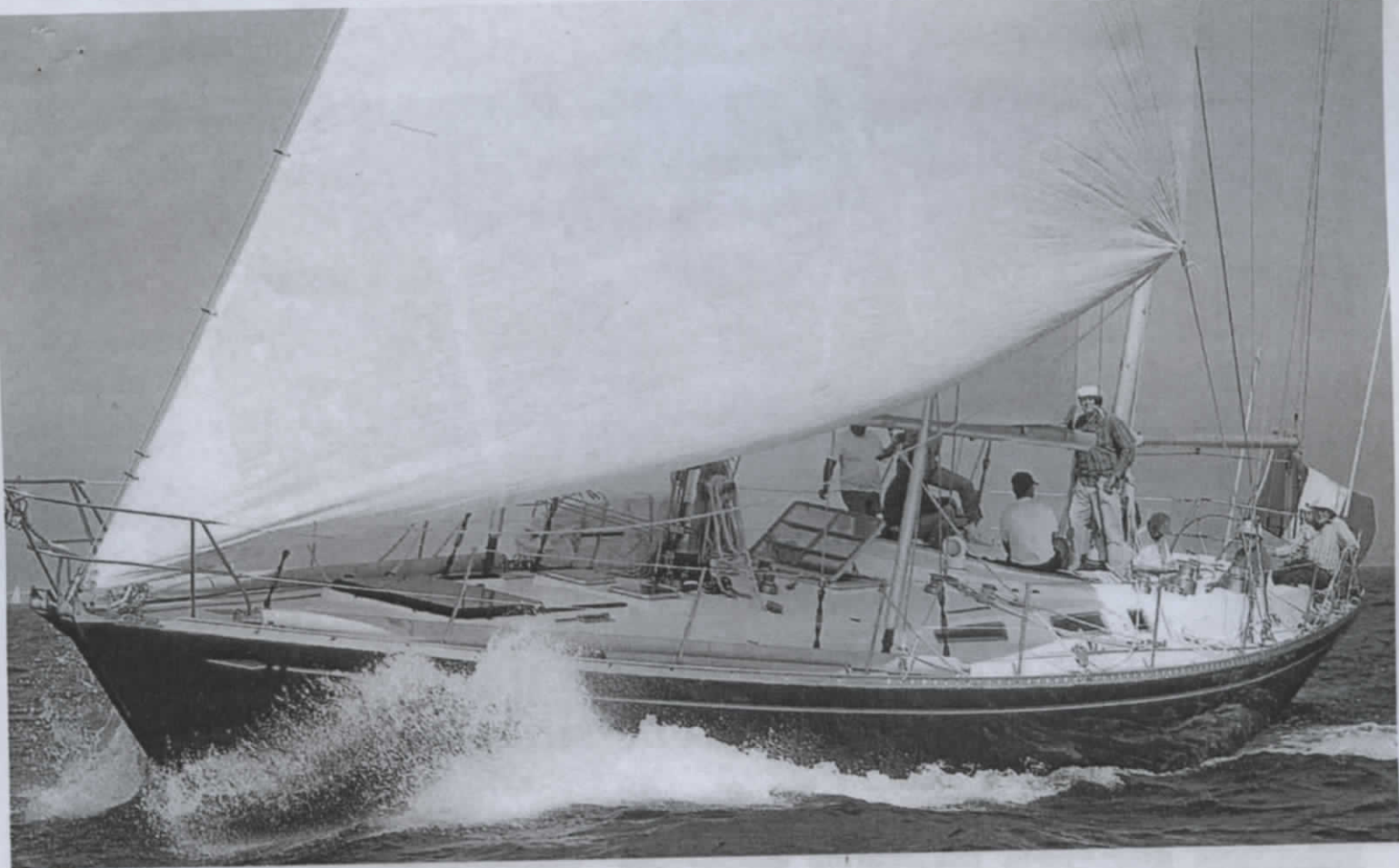
However, orders for the 65 continued and the boat remained in production until 1989.

Nineteen 65-1s were built and production ceased in 1991. During this time there were few alterations to the boat, although a popular choice was to extend the transom, thereby gaining a large lazarette. Today's successor to the 65 and 65-1 is the Swan 68.



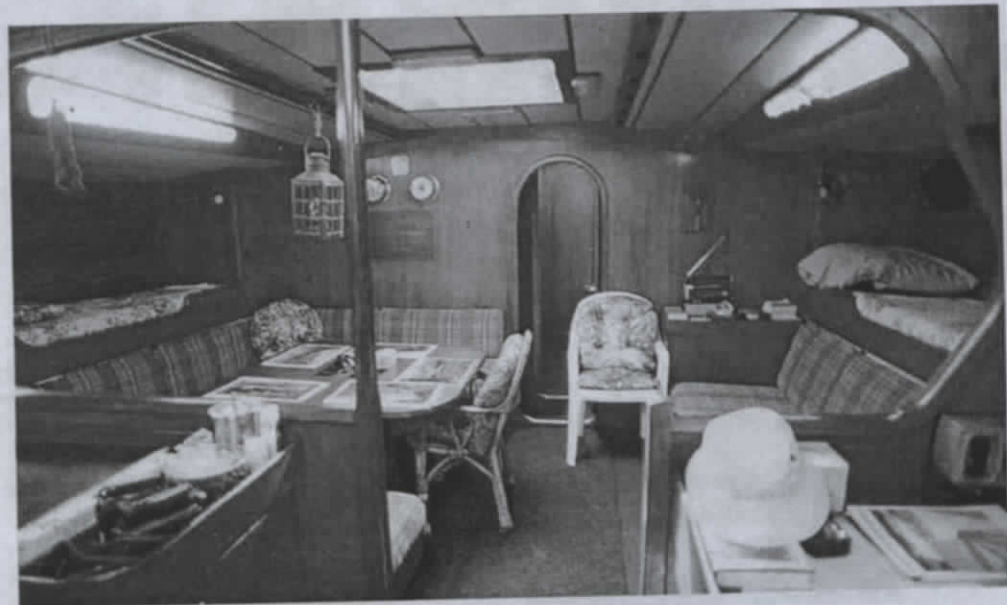
*Sayula II* sails off Cowes before the start of the 1973/74 Whitbread Race, which she won

Barry Picot/FPPI



**Main picture, *Sayula II* sets sail and heads south for Mexico. Left, Ramon Carlin has owned the boat for 20 years and raced her round the world.**

**Below left, a high degree of comfort for a Whitbread racer! Below right, note the chain drive to raise the inboard end of the spinnaker pole**



All photos: Bob Greiner

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**Right**, under her yellow spinnaker, the old Swan ran like a thoroughbred. **Below left**, her B&G instruments may look antique these days, but they work well. **Below right**, a happy owner

I wondered aloud what madness had motivated the man to set out on the months-long voyage. Carlin grabbed a book from a shelf at the navigator's station and tossed it on the chart table. It was Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World*.

"I was inspired by Slocum's book," Carlin grinned. "I wanted to sail round the world, and the Whitbread offered the chance to do that. We went for pleasure, not to prove anything. We never gave much thought to winning."

But the similarity between Carlin and Slocum stops at the circumnavigation. Slocum sailed alone and took his time. Carlin sailed with a full crew and did it in a hurry.

Today, however, in his retirement, Carlin is not in a hurry to go anywhere. He prefers leisurely cruises with his family and friends. His home is in Chihuahua, Mexico, but he spends about a third of his time aboard his beloved boat. *Sayula II*'s home port varies: San Diego, La Paz, Puerto Vallarta, Cabo San Lucas, Acapulco—wherever takes his fancy.

His companions are often familiar faces. On board for the autumn cruise to La Paz are three of the men who sailed that inaugural Whitbread race: his son, Enrique, Adolfo 'Chantis' Orenday, and navigator Ray Conrady of San Francisco.

"Ramon is a very generous man," Conrady said. "He took very good care of us."

The race was held in the days before GPS became standard for ocean races, and before EPIRBs and survival suits became mandatory.

"I received weather reports by Morse code, and all navigation was done with a sextant," he said. "With weatherfaxes and GPS systems now on every boat, I'm out of a job!"

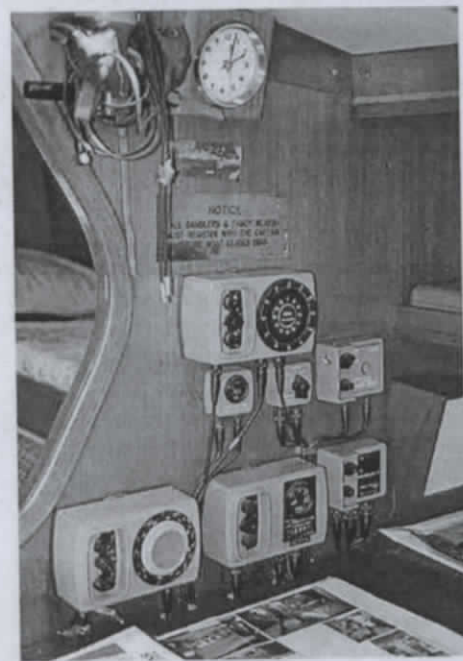
Conrady described how the now infamous rollover knocked out all *Sayula II*'s radios. The only piece of electronic gear that remained functional was the RDF, which was useless in the middle of the Southern Ocean.

"No-one knew where we were. We expected to die of hypothermia," Conrady said.

But after they bailed the water from the boat—much of it was from the burst freshwater tanks—they found no leaks, and soon the headsails were drawing them toward Sydney once again.

"Once we realised we weren't sinking, we put the boat in order and went back to sailing," Conrady said. "It was a real endorsement to the people who built this boat."

Carlin's son, Enrique, smiled as he recalled the Whitbread race, which took in his 18th birthday the day they left Cape Town. He had just come off watch when the boat rolled over.



They had been sailing in galeforce winds for several days. He had gone below and strapped himself into the galley to fix something to eat. Suddenly, he found himself standing on the deckhead, with floorboards raining about him.

Enrique still enjoys sailing *Sayula II*, but has little time since he and his brother took over their father's business, Commercial Domestica. Besides, his father doesn't race any more, Enrique said.

The fact is, Ramon Carlin and *Sayula II* retired from racing after the Whitbread. "I had to return to work," he said, "and I could see that with the new designs, she would not be as competitive."

The only competition the Finnish thoroughbred has seen since the Whitbread was in 1976, when *Sayula II* took line honours in the US bicentennial race from Bermuda to Newport, Rhode Island, as an escort to the Tall Ships fleet.

Carlin proudly points out that he finally beat *Great Britain II*. Chay Blyth's former

yacht was first home in the 1973-74 Whitbread, but was beaten by Carlin's Swan 65 on corrected time.

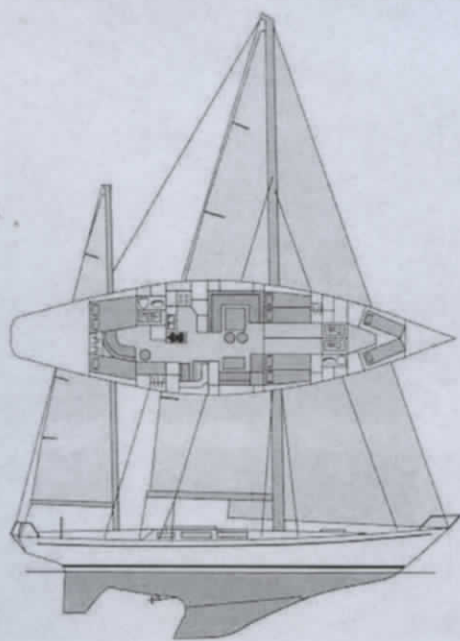
*Sayula II* is only Carlin's second yacht. His first was *Sayula*, a Cal 40, which he entered in many of the California-to-Mexico races in the Sixties and early Seventies. He sailed in the Transpac race to Hawaii once, finishing in the middle of the fleet. He is most remembered not for his finish in that race, but for stealing the show at the awards banquet to which he brought his own mariachi band.

It made his Whitbread victory all the more remarkable. An unknown, mild-mannered Mexican, in an unapproved design, accomplished what not even he thought possible. Today, he's happy to rest on those laurels, content now to sail with family and friends.

Nor does he have plans for a *Sayula III*; Carlin shook his head at the suggestion. He spent months looking at boats and talking to a host of designers before he settled on the Swan 65. He's not about to give her up now.

"I will keep her until I pass away," he said. □

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#### Dimensions:

LOA	ketch 64ft 7in	19.68m
	sloop 65ft 1in	19.84m
LWL	47ft 0in	14.33m
Beam	16ft 4in	4.98m
Draught	9ft 7in	2.90m
Disp	70,000lb	31,800kg
Sail area	1,797ft <sup>2</sup>	167m <sup>2</sup>

Built by: Oy Nautor Ab, PO Box 10, SF-68601 Pietarsaari, Finland Tel: (358) 67601 111. Fax: (358) 67 67364

UK agent: Nautor's Swan, Port Hamble, Hamble, Hampshire. Tel: (0703) 454880, Fax: (0703) 455547.

#### Second-hand price guide:

Early models (1972) £275,000, mid-period models (1977) £300,000, later models (1985) £350,000.

## SURVEYOR'S REPORT

SWAN 65s have a medium heavy displacement with a fin keel and skeg-hung rudder. Their GRP single-skin hull has foam-filled stiffening, a GRP matrix framework and a galvanised framework for the maststep. GRP sandwich construction is used for the deck with laid teak on top.

A conventional flange is used for the hull-to-deck join, with a through-bolted aluminium toerail. Structural bulkheads are of marine ply and are bonded over GRP, foam-framed hull stiffening, to ensure that there are no hardspots at the bonding of the bulkheads.

Construction of Swan 65s is basic, but they are extremely well built. Laminating and bonding of the stiffening is tidy and well consolidated. Inspecting the Swan 65 is easy, with good access to the main structure, engine room, stern gland, steering gear, skin fittings and chain locker.

Most Swan 65s are used for ocean crossing and are rarely out of commission. It is not surprising therefore that these vessels do suffer some water ingress to the hull laminate below the waterline. This can lead to an osmotic condition, particularly if the gelcoat has been damaged. However, the blisters I have found were not a structural problem, again due to a well consolidated laminate.

I have not found serious defects or structural damage to the hull or deck due to use in heavy weather. Often one finds some minor cracking at the keel-to-hull joint at the forward and after ends. This type of movement is not a problem and merely requires cosmetic filling and fairing.

On some I have found the teak-laid decks

to have been scrubbed out. Scrubbing with the grain with hard nylon has caused wear on older 65s. We always recommend light scrubbing with a soft scrubber across the grain.

Spars on the 65 are manufactured by Nautor and are of good quality and specification. Older spars on early versions have suffered from corrosion, especially at the mast heel fittings. This can be overcome by cutting and sleeving the bottom of the mast.

Deck gear is also of a high specification and is well fitted, although winches and bearings may be worn. Electrics and instruments are always of good quality and well installed. The accommodation is of good quality and, more importantly, very practical.

#### David Hopkins

*David Hopkins is a well-known racing yachtsman. He is a shipwright and has been in the marine industry for 37 years, having built and surveyed all types of yachts.*

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**Ramon Carlin is not about to give up *Sayula II*. "I will keep her until I pass away," he says**

of how much performance hardware has changed in two decades. The massive mechanical backstay tensioners on the main and mizzen, for example, are cranked by hand as there are no hydraulics aboard this boat.

The height of the spinnaker pole car is set with a hefty chain-driven adjuster, while the stainless steel stemhead fitting redefines ruggedness. The sail luffs are rope, flanked by a brigade of hanks and there is no foil, nor roller furling gear, on her forestay. A few cleats have been replaced here and there over the years, but overall the original boat remains intact and functional.

Her age is not slowing her down, however. When *Sayula II*'s brilliant yellow and orange spinnaker popped open south of San Diego's Point Loma, her classic IOR hull leapt forward like a thoroughbred from the gate. Time had taken a small toll on her appearance, but the Sparkman & Stephens pedigree was true to its name as the two-decades-old Finnish yacht, with its skeg-supported rudder, sped south on a straight-as-an-arrow track to Mexican waters.

The same can be said of *Sayula II*'s 70-year-old and only owner, Ramon Carlin, who directed the sail changes from the helm. Carlin, now retired from being head of one of Mexico's largest household appliances manufacturers and distributors, directed the spinnaker set like a 19th Century ship's master. When the need arose for an experienced hand, he relinquished the helm to go forward, haul on a spinnaker guy, and shout commands in a combination of Spanish and English to his tri-national crew.

The sails trimmed and ropes coiled to his satisfaction, he went below to the galley to tend to his crew's parched throats and grumbling stomachs.

Down below *Sayula II* has a spacious main cabin, almost anachronistic with its wide-open spaces. It seems almost inconceivable that this production yacht, in an era of the Spartan design of the Whitbread 60, could have been fastest round the world.

Comfort does not take such a back seat to performance aboard the Swan 65. Its headroom approaches 6ft 6in throughout, and opposite the forward head is a workroom, complete with vice.

Combining the crew's quarters forward, the saloon and the captain's cabin aft, there are close to a dozen hardwood berths sporting cushions or mattresses—although there is not a double berth among them. The U-shaped settee and table can seat half a dozen diners.

A brass plaque, displayed prominently on the bulkhead in the main saloon, commemorates the 1973-74 Whitbread victory. It was an unlikely scenario. A Mexican millionaire, a skipper as green as his boat's hull, enters a death defying race round the globe in an untested production boat... ▷