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## Modern Classics

# Swan 65

With an impressive racing history and a pedigree that can be traced back to *Stormy Weather* and *Dorada*, this Sparkman & Stephens creation is a masterpiece in many people's eyes.

Jonty Sherwill sailed *Desperado*, which is still actively and successfully raced

### Factfile

Featured yacht  
Swan 65 ketch  
*Desperado*,  
hull number 24,  
standard rig  
Year built 1977  
Bought for £300,000  
in 1986  
Worth now £500,000

Production yachts of all sizes have loyal devotees, but seldom does one encounter the degree of affection in which the Swan 65 is held, not only by their owners, but also by the people who look after them and those lucky enough to sail them. First launched in 1972 when a 65-footer was regarded as 'big' for a production GRP boat, the Sparkman & Stephens-designed Swan 65 has established an illustrious history, and that 41 were built over 17 years says much for the respect this outstanding yacht commanded.

The ketch-rigged 65 is a masterpiece when seen under sail or at anchor and marks the culmination of an aesthetic development that can be traced back to the Stephens classic designs *Stormy Weather* and *Dorada*. The beauty extends below the waterline with a hint of America's Cup 12-metre influence and the chance to see a 65 out of the water should not be missed. Despite the introduction in 1981 of the more modern and quicker German Frers-designed 651, of which 19 were built, the classic 65 remained in production for another

eight years, having been updated with a heavier keel at hull no 20.

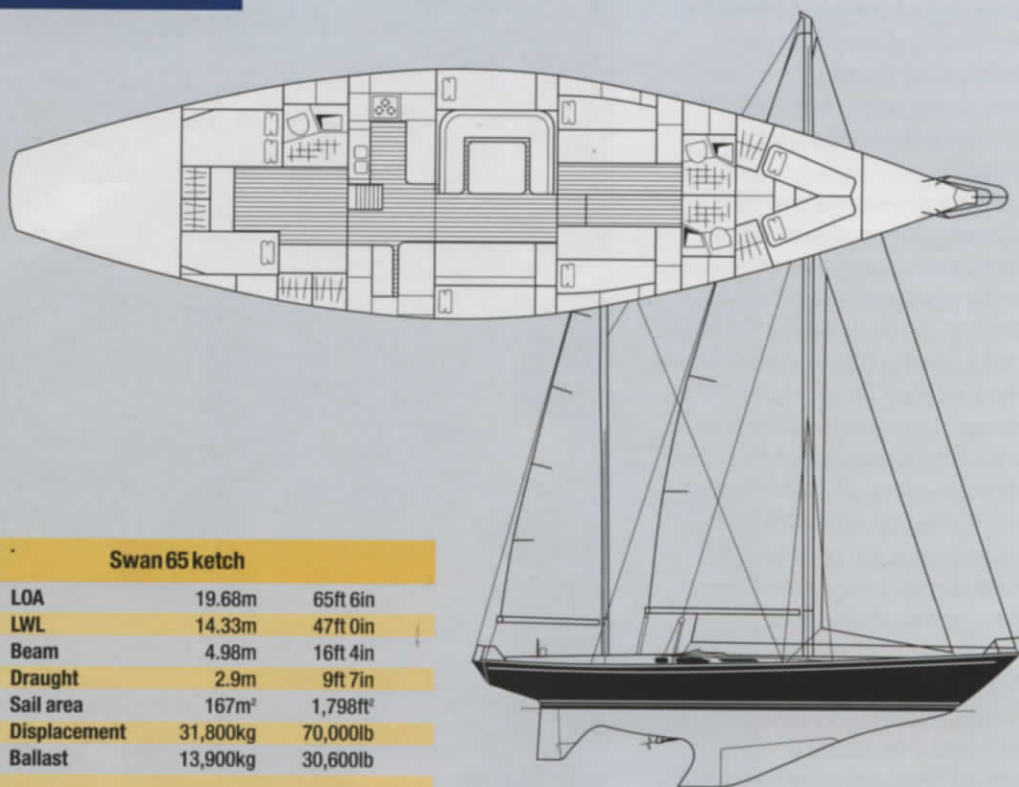
### Racing pedigree

Victory in the 1973/4 Whitbread Race for Ramon Carlin's *Sayula II* ensured legendary status for the class and a healthy order book for builders Nautor. The 1977/78 Whitbread saw three Swan 65s entered, including a sloop version, *King's Legend*, which finished 2nd overall, *Disque d'Or* in 4th place, and Clare Francis in 5th in *ADC Accutrac* becoming the first female skipper in the Whitbread Race.

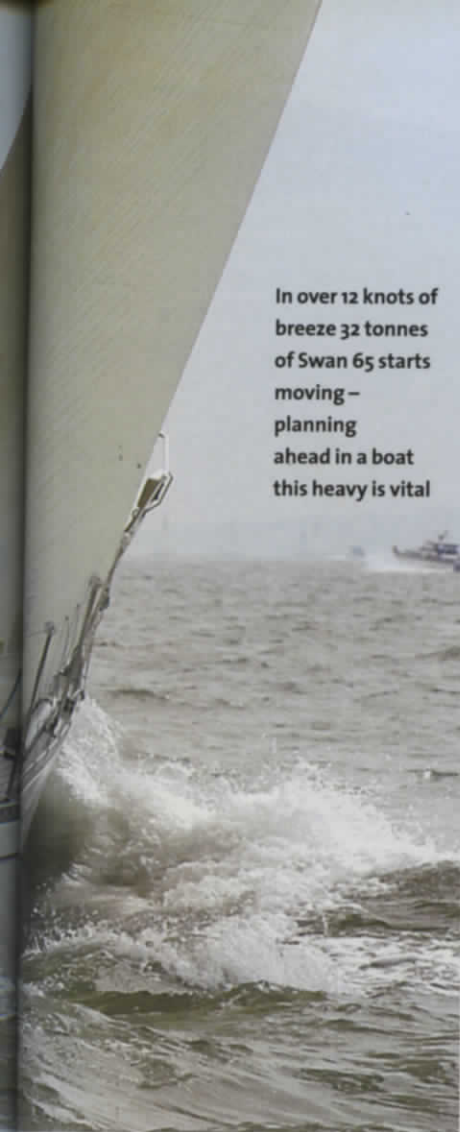


In over 12 knots of breeze 32 tonnes of Swan 65 starts moving – planning ahead in a boat this heavy is vital

**SPEC AT A GLANCE**



Swan 65 ketch		
LOA	19.68m	65ft 6in
LWL	14.33m	47ft 0in
Beam	4.98m	16ft 4in
Draught	2.9m	9ft 7in
Sail area	167m <sup>2</sup>	1,798ft <sup>2</sup>
Displacement	31,800kg	70,000lb
Ballast	13,900kg	30,600lb



All photos: Malcolm White



Some 65s are still raced enthusiastically, including our test boat *Desperado*, owned since 1986 by property developer Richard Loftus. If it's blowing more than 25 knots, you can guarantee that this yacht will be leading Class 0 IRC. Some may begrudge this elegant interloper but none can fail to be impressed by her presence and they know the crew will have worked hard for their result.

By contrast, our test was conducted during the final race of the 2004 Raymarine Warsash Spring Series, an untypically quiet

day in a series bedevilled by storms and cancellations. Seldom rising to more than 12 knots, the breeze was just enough to keep the yacht moving at around 6.8 knots upwind but in these conditions every additional tack is painfully slow, costing minutes in elapsed time. Despite the less than ideal conditions, the crew of 19 enjoyed the race, particularly the start and first beat, which included picking our way through numerous starboard-tack 45-footers on the way to the weather mark – planning ahead in a boat this



Downwind and all sail set – in heavier conditions the crew will be working hard



heavy is vital. Up to a moderate breeze the whole rig, including the mizzen, is set for upwind sailing but in heavier conditions boat speed will suffer and the mizzen is left furled on the boom ready for hoisting for the reaching legs, its real forte.

At the helm was the current *Desperado* skipper, South African-born David Bongers, a veteran of the 1981/82 Whitbread Race aboard a sistership, *Xargo III*. Sailing the Swan 65 today, particularly in a blow, one cannot help but be impressed by the tenacity of the sailors who braved the Roaring Forties in these leviathans. With a displacement of around 32 tonnes (the early boats were 3.5 tonnes lighter) this is a strictly displacement hull and in over 30 knots of wind with spinnaker up the boat begins to take command, even in the Solent.

David Bongers described how his Whitbread crew would keep a constant weather eye for squalls and in heavy seas always steered down the biggest 'hole'. Nonetheless, these boats were regarded as forgiving to sail by the crews and *Xargo III* completed her race with only one major broach.

### Design and layout

Regarded by many as one of Nautor's most sublime creations, the Swan 65, together with the original Swan 48, marked the end of an era of bold sheerlines and generous tumblehome. Nautor's Lars Strom recalls Rod Stephens's attention to detail and, having remarked that the sheer on the prototype 65 looked a little high at the stern, he was told that it had indeed been slightly increased to improve the aft cabin headroom.

Beautiful she may be but by modern standards the 65's deck space aft is limited as the hull tapers to its elegant counter stern. The deep steering cockpit, which extends almost to the transom, gets cramped while racing and offers lounging space for only four or five in comfort. The trimmers' area abaft the companionway is at main deck



Classic deep cockpit – but with the mizzen and spinnaker to be trimmed it can get crowded while racing and offers lounging space for only four or five in comfort



**Above: skipper David Bongers, owner Richard Loftus, navigator Fay Savage and Jonty Sherwill discuss the race in *Desperado's* comfortable saloon**



height and 'heads' must be called through tacks and gybes to avoid mishaps with the main boom. On *Desperado* the twin mainsheet winches are mounted abeam the companionway hatch but on some 65s the mainsheet is led to the aft cockpit which provides better communication with the

helmsman at busy moments. The mizzen is also trimmed here so it gets quite crowded and the helmsman's view is restricted.

Structurally the Swan 65 is straightforward and solid, using a GRP single-skin hull with foam-filled stiffeners and sandwich structure for the deck. The deck



## Buying *Desperado*

Owner Richard Loftus is animated about his 65, hull no 24, saying how he felt he was destined to own this particular boat. Aboard a Swan 41 at the 1982 St Maarten regatta the opportunity arose to visit a nearby 65. The owner was ashore and the skipper invited him onboard.

Four years later in the Mediterranean, Richard came across the very same boat – ownership was inevitable, the deal being done over the telephone without a survey. The next few years were spent cruising – Richard also owned a Swan 77 for racing but this was sold in 1996 and so *Desperado* was refitted to go racing.

Early on the inclined six-cylinder Perkins diesel needed a rebuild, the interior joinery was revarnished, and later Hamble Yacht Services was commissioned to respray the topsides and lay a new

teak deck. New Lewmar 77 winches replaced the three-speed 65s, new main and mizzen booms were fitted and the sails were replaced with a fresh set of Norths.

Structurally the Swan 65's hull has proved to be very tough but with the arrival of laminate sails and modern low-stretch ropes new genoa tracks were needed and the deck had to be reinforced in way of the mast gate. The primary winch coffee grinders fitted by Richard himself were added to help the hard-pushed trimmers.

One sign of age is some superficial corrosion on the alloy toerail (periodically stripped and repainted); replacement would be prohibitively expensive and involve removing much of the yacht's interior. Apart from the usual annual running expenses and the occasional bump, the boat has been trouble free and is cherished by her owner.



Most Swan 65s are ketch-rigged, but four were built as sloops

## Current prices

With a limited supply of these classic yachts, determined buyers will pay between £450,000 and £550,000 for a Concors example, but entry level for a well-travelled Swan 65 can be as low as £150,000, with yachts in average condition fetching £225,000 to £300,000.

Of the 41 boats built, of which it is thought that 38 remain, four were sloop-rigged and some of the ketches had the taller sloop main rig. Tim Quinlan of the UK Nautor's Swan office reports that three have recently been sold, with seven more currently available.

Despite advancing years, interest remains strong for one of Nautor's enduring icons, making it one of the most popular 65-footers.



forepeak vee berth, while the forward deck locker is only of real use for warps and fenders.

The classic looks of the Swan 65 continue below decks and one is immediately impressed by how beamy the saloon is, enhanced by the simple and uncluttered dinette arrangement to port. The galley is spacious and practical with good stowage and the chart table opposite is equally generous. The owner's cabin, situated abaft the saloon, is simple but stately and features a double cot berth on the port side and an en suite head.

The layout of the Swan 65 altered little during its production life, illustrating what a complete success the design was, and up forward the perfectly symmetrical layout with twin double cabins and day heads either side of a central mast

**Left centre: traditionally laid deck for a large crew. Deck hardware has to withstand the high loads imposed by modern sails and rope – some beefing up has been necessary. Left: simple but elegant – looking forward into the symmetrical twin cabins**

bulkhead lends a feeling of completeness.

The joinery throughout is plain and elegant and on this particular example very well maintained. The standard of trim is high; headlinings in cream fabric over plywood panels still look smart, and the original tan leather upholstery is now hidden by more practical blue fabric covers but the overall feeling of restrained refinement is maintained.

Obsessional bar talk about particular boats is frequently heard, and one usually takes it with a big pinch of salt, but having indulged the pleasure of racing the 65 ketch, at least inshore, I found it very easy to get drawn in by this beguiling and romantic boat. It seems that the world of yachting would be a poorer place without the Swan 65.

## Useful contacts

**Nautor's Swan, Oy**  
Nautor Ab, PO Box 10,  
Fin-68601 Pietarsaari,  
Finland. Tel: +358 676011.  
e-mail@nautors-  
swan.com Twenty-one  
sales offices around the  
world. UK website:  
www.swanyachts.co.uk

layout is generally simple and solid but with the high loads generated by a heavy boat, turning blocks need tightening up from time to time, and webbing strops need regular checking. Forward the large sliding forehatch allows the spinnakers and headsails to be dropped in for stowage on the